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THE SEA-KINGS

IN

ENGLAND.

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THE

SEA-KINGS

IN

ENGLAND:

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE TIME OF ALFRED.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE FALL OF NINEVEH."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE SEA-KINGS

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ENGLAND,

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

They parted; and Edmund, stepping swiftly, but cautiously, began to move onward, avoiding the fires, where the sleepers lay thickest, and leaving a little to the left the lighted tent, from which, as he continued to advance, the sounds of laughter and boisterous talk came with increasing loudness. One voice, rising often above the rest, soon awoke in him a strange and undefinable emotion: and, as it came with more and more power and distinctness, seemed to curdle his blood, and make his hair stand up. He paused

to listen. The deep, rough, savage tones conjured up before him the horrid scenes of his boyhood: and he felt at length a conviction that he heard again the voice of the ferocious Hubbo. An irresistible impulse forced him nearer. He stood within a spear's cast of the place which he believed to contain the being most hateful and fearful to him,—the lapse of a few minutes might place before his eyes the abhorred form which he almost dreaded, yet fiercely longed to behold,—the peril of the attempt seemed to give it but the greater charm; and the loss of time might be far overpaid by any information which, from the discourse of those within, he might be able to gather;—stepping then boldly, but carefully on, he soon stood close to the tent.

There was at first a confused sound of many voices within; and the matters of their discourse seemed almost as numerous as the speakers. From the talk of one it appeared that he was disputing some point in the game of chess, to which the Northern nations were much addicted: another seemed to be relating, in exaggerated terms, some deed of war; a third boasted some exploit of

drinking; and a fourth was repeating, in a sort of rugged verse, the battle betwixt the god Thor and the great serpent Midgard. The one harsh voice, however, which had first attracted the notice of Edmund, was for a time unheard, but soon again caught his ear, though speaking in a tone so low as to leave his meaning unintelligible. The speaker appeared to be seated close to the back of the tent; and the deep monotonous roll of his voice seemed to shake the canvass like a peal of distant thunder. From the few words which came to the ear of the listener, he gathered that the subject of this talk was some warlike attempt for the ensuing day. The person addressed, in a tone as hushed, but more articulate, appeared to advise a different course.

"They are unprovisioned," said he, "and must submit: why then should we fling away blood and life for nought?"

"I'll tarry no longer than the morrow," exclaimed the other, in a louder tone: "By the thundering God! if they do not then surrender, the gates of hell itself shall not save them from my fury! What say you," cried he then, addres-

sing the whole assembly, "Shall we longer lie sleeping before this accursed place, that has already held us these seven nights idle, when we might have scoured half the country, or shall we on the morrow storm the walls, and fling the Saxon hounds over the battlements for the wolf and the raven?"

A loud clashing of arms, and a continued vociferation, bespake the furious delight of the warriors at the prospect of active war.

"The sword thirsts for their blood!" cried one.

"Let them hang like carrion over their own walls!" shouted another.

"Odin demands them at our hands," was the cry of a third.

"See! see!" exclaimed several at once, "the raven flaps his wings! The gods call upon us! The harvest is ripe for the bloody sickle!"

At these last words, there arose a sudden and tremendous yelling within the tent, which echoed and re-echoed from hill and wood, and sounded to the ear of Edmund like what he might have conceived of the howling of rejoicing fiends. He

walked hastily to and fro, seeking, but in vain, some aperture in the tent through which he might obtain a view of the interior. Unable at last to master his impatience longer, he drew forth his dagger, and made an incision through the canvass. This was not done without some noise; but the tremendous howling and clashing of arms prevented those within from hearing it. He waited a moment, prepared for flight, should there be any sign that the act had been observed; and then applied his eye to the crevice.

The first object that he beheld was the celebrated Raven banner of the Northmen, which, elevated upon its gilded pole, appeared to move its wings as if in the act of flying. Upon this were turned the looks of some forty or fifty mail-clad men, who, standing up and clashing their sword-hilts upon their breast-plates, shouted in exultation at the mystic sign that promised victory. Edmund gazed for a moment at the magical banner, of which the history was well known to him, and then glanced round at the warriors. Their faces were flushed with wine; and their eyes shot fire. They were unhelmet-

ed, and their hair, mostly red, flowed in curls upon their shoulders. All appeared to be men of great strength, and unbounded fierceness. One gigantic form as yet stood at the farther end of the tent, with his back toward Edmund, looking up to the banner: his left hand was on his sword-hilt, and his right extended as if in exultation at the favouring sign. But the wings of the Raven were again folded; and the warrior turned round to his companions. The huge fierce countenance came upon Edmund, like the burst of a red fire. It was Hubbo that stood before him. The ferocious features had never been erased from his memory; but he did not expect that the actual appearance would equal the hideous picture of his fancy. Such, however, as his boyish fears had depicted, such was the dreadful Northman that now stood before his bodily vision. Years had nought impaired his strength, or softened his fierceness, while they had made his features yet more gross, and stamped upon them yet more strongly the characters of cruelty and savage daring.

"'Tis fixed then for the morrow," he cried:

"At sunrise shall the sacrifice be offered up, and afterwards let the Saxon look for his doom. Fill up the cups to the god of battle! The blood shall flow for him like a mountain stream! the chusers of the slain shall be wearied among the heaps of dead! Trondath, fill up the skull to the brim: we drink to the terrible god. Are ye all prepared?"

"All, all," exclaimed every voice. Hubbo lifted the skull filled with mead: his guests stood up, each holding in his extended right hand the full-charged vessel, and every eye bent upon their leader: "To Odin:"—he cried, with a voice that shook the tent,—"To the terrible and severe god!—the father of slaughter!—the god that carrieth desolation and fire!—the active and roaring deity!"

He paused betwixt each new appellative of the god; and every voice repeated the words after him. As he concluded, he cast upon the ground a libation to the deity,—then lifted the skull to his lips, and drained it at a draught. His example was followed by his guests: there

was then a brief silence; all placed their cups upon the table, and sate down.

"Ha! ha! the mass-mumbling dogs!" vociferated Hubbo, "Little dream they of the doom that hath now been passed upon them. Let them learn on the morrow,—the blasphemers! whether the god of the Northman, or the Saxon god is the terrible in battle! Let them prove if their Christ can save them, when the father of slaughter is abroad!"

"The vow hath been put up," said a warrior who sat at the left hand of Hubbo, "and I bid you not recall it: yet bethink you, prince, that your promise was passed to Sidroc not to stir in this till his return. He may even now be come back; or to-morrow ere noon, at farthest, will be here. Wait then, I counsel you, till the sun hath reached his height, before you go up against the castle. If Sidroc by that hour return not, let then the assault begin: discord else may again arise between you, and ———"

"I wait for no man!"—exclaimed Hubbo, striking his mailed hand furiously upon the table. "Not if the mace-bearing Thor himself stood

before me, and bade me delay, would I turn from my path! If the blow please not the moody Sea-king, let him right the affront as he will."

The face of Hubbo, which, before his last huge draught, had been much distempered with drink, began now to glow with heightened fury.

"Said I at sunrise that the sacrifice should be offered up?" continued he,—"By the deeps of Nastrond! they shall this night be slain,—and the castle shall be stormed ere dawn! Bring in the Saxons,—and bid the priests be called. Thunder of hell! Shall Hubbo forego his purpose, because perchance Earl Sidroc may look dark upon him?"

A fierce acclaim answered this brutal resolve; and several of the guests started up to do the bidding of their chief.

"Not because Earl Sidroc may look dark, do I counsel delay," answered the former speaker, "but because the word of Prince Hubbo hath been passed, and ought not to be broken."

These last words, together with the angry reply, escaped the ear of Edmund, who, alarmed by the rising of those who were about to rush

from the tent, had hastily retreated to some little distance, and then thrown himself down among a group of sleepers, that he might escape notice, should any one pass in that direction. In the next instant, he heard footsteps hasting toward him; and had scarcely time to cover himself with a Danish cloak, which he snatched from one who lay next him, when two of those who were speeding to summon the priests and the victims passed close beside him. A third, more intoxicated perhaps than his companions, or less able to see his way through the darkness so soon after leaving the lighted tent, stumbled over one of the sleepers, and fell with a heavy squelch upon Edmund, whom he immediately attacked with the most horrid oaths. Edmund neither moved nor spake: and the Northman, after rising, and exchanging a few hot words with the soldier over whom he had stumbled, and whom he had half awakened from his drunken sleep, staggered forward, and was soon beyond hearing. The disturbed soldier, having given vent to a little angry muttering, lay down; and his loud breathing soon assured Edmund

that sleep was again heavy upon him. After remaining for a short time uncertain what to do, our hero sat up, and beheld lights and figures advancing towards him. Apprehensive of being discovered, he immediately retired farther back, and then again lay down among a group of sleeping men, anxious to see the event. He lay, however, with his head a little elevated, so as to allow him to watch the motions of those who were moving with the torches toward the tent. An occasional glance of the lights upon the faces of these shewed him that three of them were the same who had gone to execute the command of Hubbo. By their long grey beards, and white garments, he soon recognized with them two ministers of the bloody Scandinavian religion; and, by their depressed heads, and manacled limbs, three wretches whom they were perhaps leading to the slaughter. Edmund's blood boiled at the horrid spectacle; and he felt tempted to rush forward, sword in hand, and avenge at least, if he could not save, the miserable victims. The procession moved on slowly and silently; the torches flashing, now

upon the armour of the savage warriors,—now upon the white, harsh, and furrowed faces of the bald-headed priests,—and now upon the devoted three, whose fetters clanked dismally to every step. Two of these appeared, by such hasty glimpses as Edmund could obtain, to be Saxon soldiers; but the third had the air of a chief; and his armour seemed of the finest steel. As the light dwelt for one moment steadily upon his face, Edmund felt almost a certainty that the features were those of Sigifred; and he had scarcely patience to wait till they had entered the tent, before he rapidly advanced, and again applied his anxious eye to the aperture in the canvass. The three intended victims stood with their backs toward him; but a slight motion of the head, as he stole a look upon the assembly, assured him that the captive chief was indeed the brother of Elfrida. He waited in horror, —but not wholly without hope. A few words, which concluded an address of one of the priests to Hubbo, told him that they opposed the designed sacrifice at that hour, and amid a slumbering camp. The face of Hubbo, as he listen-

ed to this objection, expressed rage and disappointed cruelty.

" Away with you then !" he cried, waving his arm impatiently :—" and look that at sunrise ye be ready for the work. Do the gods then slumber like men, that the steam of a nightly sacrifice cannot ascend to their nostrils ?"

" The offering to the terrible and severe god," answered the priest, with a calm and fearless tone, " must be made in the eye of day, amid the assembled worshippers ; not acted in the darkness and solitude of night, like a deed of shame."

" Hence then !" roared Hubbo ; " and leave us to ourselves. But take not back the victims : a greater sacrifice than yours shall go up to heaven on the beams of morning : and these shall aid us to direct the knife. Why linger ye ? We will but question the Saxons, and send them after you."

" We go"—answered the priest in the same fearless tone,—" but remember,—these are for the god, through the hands of his ministers :—

let them not be touched by other man, or their blood will be demanded of him !"

The priest held forth his arm in a warning attitude as he spoke these words ; then turned to depart. His fellow immediately advanced one step, and elevated his arm also,—" Ye have heard," he said,—" Let not the word have been spoken in vain !"

Both then quitted the tent ; and Edmund moved softly to the opposite side, that he might not be seen by them as they passed. He watched them for a few moments, gliding silently on till the darkness hid them,—listened a brief time to their footsteps,—then returned to his place ; and breathlessly awaited what should follow.

There had been a dead stillness in the tent since the departure of the priests ; and, when Edmund now looked in, all still remained silent and unmoving. Hubbo sat with quivering lip, and look expressive of rage and bloody resolve. His red eye was bent upon the captives, like that of a tiger about to spring upon the prey within his reach : and a slow motion of the starting muscles of the jaw showed the fierceness

with which his teeth were grinding together. The eyes of all were fixed upon him; and no man stirred, or spake a word. He at length opened his lips, as if about to speak: his eyes, at the same moment, dilated, and seemed to emit fire,—but again he returned to his former state; and another interval of silence passed. This abortive attempt was twice repeated. Leaning at last a little forward, with his right hand spanning his thigh, and his left resting upon the hilt of his sword, he again shot fire upon the faces of the captives, and with a slow, harsh tone, emitted through his closed teeth, thus addressed them:

"Ye are to die on the altar stone! The knife of the priest will cut forth your hateful hearts, —and in your entrails will he seek to read the things to come! Your blood shall be poured upon the ground,—your flesh shall feed the carrion crow and the wolf,—and the dogs shall gnaw your bones!"

He paused here, and rolled his eyeballs from one to the other, as if enjoying the sight of their mental torment. There was a fearful silence:

the faces of the three were turned from the eye of the one sympathizing and horror-chilled spectator without; but the quivering reflection upon their chains marked the trembling of their limbs. Speaking still through his closed teeth, Hubbo, in the same low and grating tone, again addressed them.

"Wretches that ye are!—have ye aught to say that may save you from the doom?"

Sigifred, after a while, replied: "I have offered for these and for myself a princely ransom: release us and it shall be doubled."

"Not were it told ten times before me, shall you go free:" exclaimed the Northman. "It hath this night been told me that there is a secret entrance to yon castle: guide us thither, and no hair of your heads shall be touched."

"We are strangers here," returned Sigifred, "and know nought of it, if such there be."

"Liar!" exclaimed Hubbo, stamping furiously, and drawing forth his sword,—"Ye know it well; and no stranger to this place would have dared attempt the passage through an enemy's camp. Speak! or I will carve you piece by

piece to the bone; and leave you hours of dying agony. Will you guide us through the secret path?"

"We know of none such" said Sigifred again, "and have never till yesterday beheld the walls. Our blood will serve you not: take the ransom, and let us depart to our own homes."

The foam flew from the lips of Hubbo as he started up, and, in a voice of thunder, cried,

"Bind his right arm upon the table, and bring here a red brand to stay the bleeding!"

Instantly two or three of the savages came forward, and seized the arm of Sigifred, which they held extended upon the table, while another hastened from the tent.

"Dog!" cried Hubbo, gnashing his teeth, "I will lop thy false limb, and sear the spouting veins with the red hot wood, unless thou tell me instantly that which I demand of thee."

"Fiend of hell!" cried Sigifred, with the daring of madness, "do thy worst! I have nothing to tell thee; and would die ten deaths rather than betray my countrymen to thy butchery."

Hubbo lifted his sword; and the blow was

descending upon the wrist of Sigifred, when one of his followers, springing forward with a shriek of horror, ran against the falling arm, and caused the blow to miss its aim. The sword cut deep into the table; but in the next moment was lifted again,—fell upon the head of the Saxon soldier, and clove through the leathern helmet down to the neck. At the same instant of time a spear from an unseen arm rang upon the steel breastplate of Hubbo,—glanced off,—passed through the bosom of one of the Danish chiefs, and started out at his back. The body of the slain Saxon had scarcely reached the earth when that of the Northman also sank with a heavy clang. A scene of strange confusion followed. The door of the tent stood open; and through that alone could the lance have entered.

"The traitorous priests!" roared Hubbo,—"Out and pursue them!"

Snatching up a few torches, fifteen or twenty Danes instantly darted out, with their swords drawn, uttering horrible imprecations. The rest crowded round their slain companion, and their voices rose all together.

" This lance has been hurled by no priest's arm," cried one.

" There is not the man in this camp, save prince Hubbo himself, or Sidroc, that could have dealt such a blow," said another.

" 'Tis the spear of a Saxon,"—shouted a third, " I beheld the gleam of his armour as he passed from the door of the tent."

" This is the blow of neither priest nor Saxon," whispered one to those near him, " prince Hubbo hath laid hands upon the victim for the sacrifice, and the indignant god hath himself sent the weapon of his wrath."

" Why fell it not then," said another, " upon the guilty? Why hath prince Hubbo escaped, and Godfrid perished?"

" And fell not the spear then upon the prince?" replied the former speaker—" but the armour upon his breast was forged by no earthly hands, and the enchanted steel will turn aside the weapon of even a god."

" I hear you," replied the objector, " and will believe these tales when I find armour that can stand the blow of my battle-axe."

Amid all this tumult of voices, Hubbo sat down, and took no part in the agitation of his companions. His violence of manner had subsided; and he appeared to be internally forming some new resolve. His face grew pale, and deadly ferocious, while his eyes glared upon Sigifred as if he would rend him limb from limb. Calling at length for silence, he bade some of them fling out the carrion,—pointing to the murdered soldier,—and then, in tones of the most deadly malignity, again addressed Sigifred.

"Saxon hound!" said he, pointing to the horrid cup from which he had been drinking, "That skull once stood upon the neck of Ella, king of Northumbria,—of him that put to death my father, the renowned, the terrible Ragnar Lodbrog. Little dreamed the bold fool of the vengeance that would follow that deed. This very knife,"—drawing out his dagger,—"carved the back of the howling wretch,—and these hands spread abroad his ribs. I tell thee now,—not by the quick steel of the treacherous priest shalt thou die at sunrise,—but by these hands that took vengeance upon Ella,—by the same

lingering death,—and even in this hour, and in this tent, shall thy torments begin. Wilt thou, to 'scape this misery, guide us by the secret way to the castle ?"

" You cannot perpetrate such hellish cruelty upon one who never injured you," cried Sigifred, with a look of terror and agony,——" Remorseless as you are, you cannot so outrage humanity, and incense your Creator. I tell you again,—and so may God in this hour of horror assist me as I tell you true ! I know nought of the castle, or of its concealed entrances, if such there be. I am a stranger here—I came yesterday a long journey from the east—my foot hath never been within yonder walls—I cannot speak that of which I know not. Slay me, if you will, as you have already slaughtered my follower—too happy to have met such death—but spare me the pangs that you threaten—I am young, and have been tenderly bred—think of your own son, if such you have—think if he should be exposed to so horrible a death.——Slay me at once, and be merciful,—I cannot endure the agony that you

threaten,—but, were it tenfold greater, I could not tell you that which is unknown to me."

"Cowardly slave!" cried Hubbo, with a smile of fiendish malignity,—"What hath a wretch like thee to do with soldier's arms? Think of my son—sayst thou? Saxon hound! I think of my father. I think of the dungeon where he died, slowly, gnawed to the bowels by serpents. But he wailed not like thee, base worm! Ragnar sang the deeds of his arm in fifty battles,—he died with the words of triumph in his mouth, and laughed in his death agony." Turning then to his silent companions,—"Strip off his armour," he said, "and bind him to the pillar of the tent. Place then the watch taper upon the table. One hour longer shall he have for thought. If then he speak not that which assuredly he knoweth, —even with the sinking of the flame shall the knife plough open his back."

His command was instantly obeyed: Sigifred, stripped to the waist, was tied by the upraised hands to the pole that supported the roof of the pavilion; and a short taper of wax was lighted, and placed full in the view of the hapless youth,

that he might watch the wasting of his own minutes, and foresee the moment when his torments must begin. His follower was ordered to stand beside him; and warned that the fate which he would be compelled to witness should be his own also if he refused to give the required information. The sight of the sufferers appeared to move no one to compassion; while the threatened death afforded them a subject for mirth and banter.

The mind of Sigifred had been little open to the influence of religion; and he had regarded its duties as little more than the trade of priests. In this dreadful situation, however, he felt that nothing short of divine power could avert his fate; and he called mentally upon God to pity and preserve him. His thoughts glanced at intervals upon his parents,—his beloved, though of late harshly treated, sister,—his splendid hopes, doomed to be cut off by a bloody and inhuman death,—and he with difficulty restrained himself from bursting out into lamentations which would, he knew, excite in his persecutors nothing but mockery, or perhaps an attempt to inflict upon

him yet severer agonies. Amid the brutal mirth and revelry of those around him, he watched, with feelings of unutterable wretchedness, the gradual wasting of the death-dooming taper. One-half was consumed; and his starting eyeballs followed the devouring flame as it proceeded to the completion of its task. At every entering footstep he listened with breathless earnestness for some sound that might suggest hope: —but none came. Several of the captains who had been sent out returned to say that the priests were reposing on their couches; and that they had vainly sought for any one by whom the fatal lance had been thrown. Fridulph, who had hastened to bring in the burning brand, had been found near the entrance of the tent with his head almost severed by the stroke of a sword; and all vainly conjectured the cause of two such strange occurrences. Meantime, they placed guards near the outside of the tent, and with great glee awaited the moment when the fatal taper should expire. One-fourth was yet unconsumed, when the sound of many voices was heard at a distance; and for a moment the faces of all expressed doubt

and alarm. The heart of Sigifred beat with a violence that threatened to suffocate him; for he hoped that a sally from the castle had taken place, and that even yet he might be rescued. Several of the captains who had looked forth, reported that the sounds came from the tents of the women, whom they could descry advancing with torches in their hands, which they waved round their heads while they howled and shouted. While they were yet speaking, the blast of a trumpet was heard, and the trampling of horse near the tent. Sigifred uttered a stifled shriek of joy,—but in the next moment relapsed into despair.

"The dark Sea-king approaches,"—cried Hubbo,—"Blow out the taper; and remove these Saxons to the tent of Godfrid: but let them be at hand when again I shall summon them: their doom stands unaltered. Take heed, Sir Saxon, of the hell-black locks!" fiercely grasping with his iron hand the hair of Sigifred,—"take heed, I say: the path to the castle ere morning,—or the hidden way to thy trembling vitals, must be

laid before us. Think upon it—and abide the doom thyself shalt pronounce !"

Sigifred and his follower were instantly hurried from the tent ; and, soon after, the majestic figure of Sidroc entered. His helmet was of clouded steel, crested with a dragon of gilded brass. A long spear was in his right hand. His countenance was lowering, and he cast upon all a glance of rebuke.

" What means yon tumult,"—demanded Hubbo,—" Are the women drunken, that they disturb the camp at this hour ?"

" Thunder of Heaven !" exclaimed Sidroc, " what means this disorder among your men, while a Saxon garrison lies close at hand, strong, desperate, and prompt to seize all advantages ? Know you, Prince Hubbo, that through the camp not one watch-fire blazes, and not one sentinel keeps guard ? The women are not drunken, Hubbo,—nor come they to disturb the camp, but to arouse drunkards, and remind them that they are men, and in the presence of an enemy. Up, and away then, every man that would serve his country ! Bid sound the trumpet and

the drum,—and stir the unordered sleepers to some sense of duty, ere the war-cry and the steel of the Saxon give them a more fearful waking."

"You talk largely, Earl Sidroc,"—replied Hubbo, in an angry tone,—"but we desire no schooling here. If the watchers sleep, the father of slaughter wakes,—and will guard his worshippers. We have held the feast of the God; and the cup may not be stinted when the Northman drains it to the glory of Odin. But trouble not your heart for the Saxon: to-morrow at sunrise the raven flies over his battlements: and till then let the soldiers sleep."

"Are you mad, Prince Hubbo?" exclaimed the Swede; "What, if the watchful Saxon this night issue from his walls, and bring the sword upon you——"

"Let it come!" returned Hubbo, interrupting him; "By the flames of Surtur! * no fire shall

* Then Thridi opened his mouth and said, Yet, before all things, there existed what we call *Muspelsheim*. It is a world luminous, glowing, not to be dwelt in by strangers, and situate at the extremity of the earth.

be kindled this night, and no man shall be stirred from his slumber! Who then are these Saxons, that we should disturb ourselves for fear of them? Let them descend from their hiding-place: our women shall beat them back: and Sidroc, if he will, may keep watch to lead them on. But let us have no quarrel upon this. And now, Sidroc, what tidings eastward? what forces hear you of?"

"I know of no tidings so bad," replied Sidroc sternly, "as that Northmen should lie like hogs under the walls of an enemy,—and I hear of no force so mean that might not be an overmatch for such. But I answer no questions tonight; and I remind you, Prince Hubbo, of a

Surtur, (the Black,) holds his empire there. In his hands there shines a flaming sword. He shall come at the end of the world; he shall vanquish all the gods, and give up the universe a prey to flames. Hear what the Voluspa says of him:—

"Surtur, filled with deceitful stratagems, cometh from the south. A rolling sun beams from his sword. The gods are troubled; men tread in crowds the paths of death; the Heaven is split asunder."—Mallet, Vol. ii. p. 10, Second Fable of the Edda.

promise which, from your own words, you seem to have forgotten. Swore you not, by your sword-hilt, that, till my return, you would plan no assault here? Yet at sunrise, say you,——"

"Enough! enough!" roared Hubbo,—"I bandy no words. The oath is sworn; and to-morrow's dawn shall see us burst their gates. If thou like it not, call together thy men,—get to thy ships,—and leave us. By the serpent-walls of Nastrond, I will not be fooled from my purpose!"

"Then to your madness I abandon you," cried Sidroc, striking his spear into the ground: "Twice have I already quitted you, and the prayer of Aslauga hath brought me again to your side: but now I depart, and for ever. The messengers of Godrun have three times invited me to join my arms with his,—and on the morrow I will set forth."

"Away! away!" shouted Hubbo, with a scornful laugh. "I drink to thy speedy journey, Earl Sidroc. The sun will shine the brighter when thy face of night hath vanished from us."

So saying, he filled his drinking skull to the brim, and emptied it before he replaced it upon the table. Sidroc looked in stern silence upon the inebriated chief; then, turning to the captains, exhorted them to break up their revel, and get the camp into some state of order without delay. These words were heard by Hubbo, and stirred him to the utmost fury.

"Hence with thee, black wolf!"—he bellowed—"Rule thy own captains,—and leave to me the control of mine. Thy insolence demands punishment,—and one breath more shall draw it upon thee."

"He knows not how to rule others," retorted Sidroc, "who so little can rule himself. The son of Ragnar Lodbrog ought not to sink himself below the level of a beast. The leader of brave men ought not to steep his brain in wine like a debauched gleeman: and Prince Hubbo knows well that Sidroc dreads no punishment that *he* has the right, or the power to inflict. Farewell."

He waved his arm as he concluded, and was turning to depart, when Hubbo, flinging back the

couch on which he had been seated, started up, —drew his sword,—and, fired with a madman's rage, flew upon him.

"To hell!" he shouted, with a roar that shook the tent; and struck at him a blow that might have severed the neck of an ox. Sidroc, with the utmost coolness, stepped back,—and the heavy weapon balked of its aim, drove down into the earth. With the speed of lightning then he drew out his own sword; and, ere that of his antagonist was raised for a second blow, struck it from his grasp with a force that sent it whirling and hissing against the farther side of the tent. Hubbo stared like a man suddenly wakened from a dream,—while Sidroc, with perfect composure, bade him the good night, and vanished from the tent.

A short silence followed. Fixed as a statue with the extremity of baffled rage, Hubbo stood staring at the door from which the Swede had disappeared, till it seemed as if the passion would convulse him. His eyeballs started and flamed like those of a mad bull,—his teeth were set, and his wide-drawn lips were covered with

foam,—while his broad chest slowly swelled, and his hands tightened and shook with a gripe that seemed as if it might have compressed iron. His captains had all started up to interpose between the combatants: but not a man now moved or spake, so strong and dreadful did this fury appear. The tramp of the departing horsemen was at length heard,—and Hubbo, relaxing his rigid limbs, and uttering a deep execration, in a tone like the growl of a lion, sheathed his sword, which had been laid upon the table,—returned to his seat,—and remained for a while pale, silent, and glaring like a chained maniac. His first words were a command to bring back the Saxon prisoners: and a grim smile, like a gleam of ghastly lightning round the jaws of a midnight whirlpool, played over his horrid countenance as he beheld the pale victim again bound to the pillar, and the small remainder of the death-dooming taper kindled before him.

"I will be just with thee Saxon," he said, with a look and tone of diabolical mockery: "Thy hour is not yet run out: haply, ere the

flame expires, thy remembrance may return to thee."

He laid then his dagger upon the table; and sat with his eyes fixed upon the face of Sigifred. There was a dead stillness in the tent; and the only sounds without were the outcries of the women, which were gradually subsiding. After a little time, all was hushed: and nought was heard but the loud beating heart of the intended victim, his trembling breath, and the low muttering of his lips, engaged with inarticulate prayer. The taper was almost consumed: the eyes of Sigifred glared upon it with unutterable horror, —but his tongue was unable to form one word.

"Fill your cups to the brim,"—cried Hubbo, as the last moments drew nigh,—"I give you a pledge;—and the Saxon shall drink it after us. Place the skull of Ella to his mouth, when I shall have drained it,—and tell him that to-morrow night his own shall stand upon the banquet board."

He paused a moment, and then said, "To the memory of the brave, the terrible, the unconquered Ragnar Lodbrog!"

All repeated the words, and emptied their cups to the ominous pledge. Hubbo laid down his horrid vessel, which was immediately filled anew, and presented to the lips of Sigifred, who shrunk from it with unutterable loathing.

"Drink!" cried Hubbo, in a voice of thunder, "drink,—or the dagger shall force open thy jaws!"

"Oh God!" cried Sigifred with a shriek of despair and horror: "save me Oh God! save me!"

The taper went out as he uttered these words; and Hubbo started from his seat, clenching the dagger. "Thou callest too late Saxon,"—he said,—"Thy hour is passed,—and neither man nor God can help thee!"

As he uttered these words, a loud cry was heard without,—a clashing of arms,—a quick trampling of feet,—and, in a moment after, with a bound like an antelope,—and a face that shone like fire, a youthful warrior sprang into the tent.

CHAPTER II.

Sigifred had swooned, as the taper went out, or, in the heroic warrior who now, for his sake, set at nought every peril, he would have known the despised youth whose love for Elfrida had so exasperated his proud mind. With head loosely hanging on his back,—relaxed limbs,—opened mouth and eye,—and face like marble,—he remained suspended by the wrists to the pillar; and Edmund's first glance assured him that he was dead.

"I come too late!" he cried. "Hell dog! thy hour is at hand!"

Aiming then one vengeful stroke at him whom he deemed the murderer, he again glanced like fire from the tent.

The first alarm without had startled every man,—for the cry of real terror could not be mistaken,—and when Edmund entered the tent,

every sword was drawn, and every foot was hasting toward the door. The perilous stroke which, in the moment of unbridled indignation, he had made at Hubbo, was turned aside by three or four swords, rapidly interposed, and, in the next instant, lifted against himself. To have remained alone against such odds would have been mere madness,—a flinging away of life: the fate which he had hastened forward to avert from Sigifred, had, as he thought, already overtaken him; and he knew that ample means of vengeance were nigh. Rapidly then as he had entered, even so rapidly he disappeared, that he might unite himself with those whom, at the agonized shriek of Sigifred, he had suddenly quitted. The brief interval betwixt the hurling of the spear at Hubbo, and his appearance in the tent, had sufficed to carry him to the castle,—to make known the state of the enemy,—to depict the horrid death impending over the young nobleman,—and finally to bring the Saxons, swiftly and secretly, into the very heart of the camp. Their number, it is true, was not a tenth part that of the Northmen;

but their advantages were great, and their determination was to conquer or to fall.

Edmund had scarcely quitted the tent of Hubbo when several of those who had been stationed as guards rushed in with loud cries, "The enemy is upon us! Take heed of yourselves!"

In the same moment a tremendous shout of the Saxons rent the air,—the clash of weapons began,—and the cries of the awakened, and terror-stricken Northmen joined in hideous chorus. Hubbo and his chiefs had scarcely time to put on their helmets, seize their spears and shields, and snatch up the magical banner, when a body of Saxon soldiers and chiefs, with Edmund at their head, rushed in, and a tremendous conflict began. The Danish captains were all men of great strength, skill at their weapons, undaunted courage, and experience in war. Animated by the thunder shout of Hubbo, who, wielding an enormous iron-spiked mace, flew with the rage of a wild bull upon the assailants, they soon bore back all opposition, and forced their way from the tent, uttering loud and incessant cries of "Odin! Odin!" Edmund himself was struck

down by the blow of an axe upon the helmet, and lay for a moment senseless. He beheld the last Dane issuing from the tent as he recovered; and instantly followed, and mingled in the battle. The din and confusion was terrific. Except where Hubbo, and his little band, fought with the fury of tigers against a number far superior to themselves, the whole camp presented nothing but dismay and flight on the part of the Danes, —exultation, pursuit, and havoc, on that of their enemy. The shouts, the yells, the groans, the clashing of armour, were terrific. The moon had just risen, and cast a feeble light, sufficient to guide the assailants in their work, and to show to the disordered and panic-stricken Danes the hopelessness of their situation, but not to enable them to combine their strength for resistance. The watch-fires also had been stirred, and their lurid gleam only heightened the horrors of the field.

Sigifred, meantime, began to recover from his swoon; and his amazement was unspeakable to hear the uproar around him, and to see the tent emptied of all save himself, and two or three

Saxon soldiers who lay dead near the entrance. The truth, however, soon burst upon him; and he struggled with all his strength to free his arms from the cords that held him to the pillar: but his efforts were in vain; and he dared not cry out for assistance, lest an enemy should appear instead of a friend. He heard the roar of battle, the Saxon war cry, and the clamour of the Northmen, close to the tent; and he could not know to which side the victory might lean. Sounding often above all the din, he distinguished the terrible voice of Hubbo, raging like a wild beast; and one other shout, like a clear trumpet call, which brought to his thoughts the presumptuous lover of his sister; whom, however, he supposed to be far distant. There was a rushing to and fro, as of the breakers upon a rocky beach: the stamp of feet, and the clang of sword, and shield,—the shout of the victor, the yell and the groan of the vanquished. But the Northmen appeared at length to be retreating, or driven back: their shouts grew feebler, and the voice of the Saxons louder, and more triumphant. He was about to utter a cry for

help, when suddenly a new and appalling voice was heard, and the Northmen, answering it with a joyful acclaim, seemed to be in turn driving back the Saxons. "Sidroc! Sidroc!" was the call that now sounded in thunder through the tent. The name seemed to the Northmen like a spell to waken the dead;—and the clangor of arms, the shouts, and the tramplings, arose with redoubled uproar.

Sigifred listened with terror, and expected every instant that death might approach him. Furious and long was the struggle: but once more the Saxons appeared triumphant; and he at length lifted up his voice, and called for help. Again and again he shouted,—but the tumult without drowned his voice, and no one came to release him. Among the Saxon garrison was, as he hoped, Cynegils, the son of the Earl of Wilts, who had left Maximus Castle a day before his own departure, and upon him he began now to call aloud, in the hope that either himself, or some one to whom he was known, might hear.

This youth, but one day before the tidings of

this new invasion, and the summons of Oddune, reached Maximus Castle, had been presented by Earl Ethelbert to Elfrida as the man whom he desired her to look upon as her future husband: and the choice had the hearty approbation of Sigifred, who hoped that his sister would now be speedily weaned of her affection for the daring and beggarly stranger whom she had debased herself by noticing. By Elfrida this youth had been openly and instantly rejected with cold disdain; and this refusal had stirred in Sigifred and the Earl a more bitter animosity against him, for whose sake they well knew that she had scorned so desirable an alliance; and had aroused in Sigifred a doubled determination to aid the cause of his young friend by every means that he could command. Vows of friendship and mutual assistance had been exchanged betwixt them; and each considered the other as bound to him by imperishable ties.

Upon this youth, therefore, Sigifred began to call aloud; and his vociferations, after awhile, attracted notice. A soldier entered the tent, and hastily demanded who called upon Cynegils.

Sigifred knew not the man, but implored him to cut his bonds, and help him to get on his armour. The soldier instantly complied, and told him that Cynegils was at hand, and engaged in hot fight with the small body of the Northmen who still combated. A few hurried questions and replies informed Sigifred of the manner of the attack, and the probable destruction of the whole Danish army. He was quickly attired in his armour, which, when stripped from him, had been flung into a corner of the tent; and now, in full spirits, and with a keen thirst of vengeance, issued forth with the soldier. They soon reached the place where Cynegils fought: a mutual and joyous, though brief, recognition passed betwixt the two friends; and they then rushed together upon the enemy.

Though, at the prospect of the horrible, inglorious, and solitary death which had so lately threatened him, the soul of Sigifred had at last sunk strengthless, yet was he naturally brave; and he now mingled in the battle with the vindictive rage of a galled tiger. Hubbo was the object of his vengeance; nor was he long in

discovering, by his well remembered voice, the place where he fought. Calling upon Cynegils to stand by him, he hastened forward, longing to bury his sword in the body of the monster. But his heart misgave him as he drew nigh, and beheld the work of that terrible arm. The ground was strewed with bodies that had fallen before the sweep of his enormous mace; and it appeared for a moment as if no man dared venture again within his reach. Two Saxon soldiers at length sprang upon him; and, in the instant that the weapon of the Northman was turned against them, Sigifred rushed in on the opposite side, and made a fierce thrust with his sword at the face of his enemy. The weapon merely grazed the averted cheek and drew blood: but, with the impulse of the thrust, Sigifred was brought close to the towerlike body of the Dane; who feeling an enemy close upon him, dashed at him his huge shield, and drove Sigifred with stunning violence to the ground. Cynegils in an instant dragged his friend backward, and Hubbo sprang forward upon other enemies. But this was a warning to the young nobleman not

hastily again to approach within the vortex of that human whirlpool: and he waited eagerly for the time when, at better advantage, he might strive to snatch his revenge. The rush of battle, however, bore him away; and he turned his fury upon other enemies.

Edmund, meantime, was far away from the man whom alone he longed to cope with. Scarcely had he begun to mingle in the fight, when the shriek of women, at no great distance, caught his ear; and he turned almost involuntarily at the pity-moving sound. He had no experience of the license of war; and beheld with indignation a huge Saxon chief who dragged by the long hair a fallen woman, while in the other hand he grasped the locks of a delicate-looking girl, whom he was with brutal language forcing onward. From both issued the most piercing shrieks, which were answered by their captor with mingled laughter and execrations. Unable to endure the sight of this, Edmund hasted toward them, and laid his hand with a stern grasp upon the arm of the Saxon.

"Are you a man, and a Christian?" cried

he: "Forbear,—and seek a nobler employment for your strength."

The Saxon still held his gripe upon the women, and looked sternly at the interrupter.

"Who then in the fiend's name, are you," he demanded, "that presume to command me? I am Beornwulph: these women are my captives: and at your peril touch, or interfere with them. By the bones of St Ethelbert I will make you rue this insolence!"

The elder female had now raised herself from the ground, and turned with imploring voice and look upon Edmund. "Save us! oh! save us from this brutal man!" she cried: "I am Aslauga, the queen,—this is my only child."

The piercing tone came distinct upon the ear of Edmund amid all the roar of the battle: he remembered, well remembered, the kindness of the queen to him when a captive among the Northmen: and he resolved to repay it. He was about to remonstrate resolutely with Beornwulph, when the latter, enraged at the words of his captive, shook her furiously by the hair, and with the most savage language threat-

ened instant death to her. Edmund could refrain no longer: he struck the Saxon with the pummel of his sword upon the helmet, and sent him stunned to the ground. "Away!" he cried: touched then the hand of the queen, who instantly seized that of her daughter, and, with all the speed they could make, hastened with them from the thick of the battle. But it was with no small peril to himself that he proceeded. Many a hot-blooded Saxon appeared disposed to contest with him the possession of two such captives; but the stern voice with which he repulsed them, and the menace of his sword, deterred them from the actual attempt: many a group of flying Northmen also seemed about to rush upon him,—but his own threatening attitude, and the voice of the queen, who was known to all, preserved him from assault. They had already passed beyond the scene of actual slaughter, and Aslauga who, at the request of Edmund, directed their path, had often, but vainly, conjured the grateful youth to leave them, and provide for his own security: he had seen as yet no Danish chief to whom he thought he might with

safety surrender his charge, and could not consent to abandon them, amid the perils of such a tumultuous field, to the terrified, and half-armed soldiers who were seeking their own safety in headlong flight,—or to leave them, at the too probable chance that they might again fall into the hands of their enemies. A band of Danish soldiers, headed by a tall and noble-looking leader, whose spear point and helmet gleamed to the moonlight, now, however, was swiftly advancing toward them; and to these Edmund resolved to entrust their safety.

"'Tis Sidroc, my husband!" cried the queen: "he will guard us. Thanks, young Saxon!—a thousand, and a thousand grateful thanks! May the shield of Odin be over thee! Haste, haste away! and oh! that thy steps may be swift and secure, even though too surely thou goest with the sword against my unhappy countrymen! Farewell! Yet stay—they are close upon us,—Sidroc may protect thee,——"

"I ask no protection,"—replied Edmund: "Doth the golden-haired queen remember the

child of Croyland, whom Sidroc preserved from the slaughter of the monastery ?"

" What !" replied she, " the boy Edmund, whom the Sea-king and myself so loved ?"

" The same," returned the youth ; " I am he : farewell."

He impressed a kiss upon the hand of the queen, and glanced like an arrow from her sight. At that instant Sidroc came up : he could tarry for no words,—but bade six of his followers attend her,—betake then to horse,—and fly to their ships instantly. " That madman," he cried in the bitterness of his heart, " hath brought ruin upon us all ! Away away ! If I come not from the battle, hasten back to your own country."

He wrung her hand,—tenderly, though briefly, embraced her,—and moved onward with long and rapid strides. His subsequent attack upon the Saxons, whom he for a time repelled, has been already noticed. He had no hope of success ; but went resolved to perish gloriously, in full confidence that he should pass instantly to the hall of Valhalla, to partake the eternal bliss

apportioned to heroes who fall bravely in battle. And many were the warriors that sank that night before the arm of Sidroc.

Edmund, meantime, found his return to the place of conflict less easy than he had expected. Several small groupes of flying Northmen encountered, and held a fierce, but always a brief, contest with him. The roar of battle behind them, and the strength and desperate resistance of their antagonist, deterred them from a protracted struggle with him. At length, however, an enemy presented himself upon whom Edmund became the instant and resolved aggressor. Flying at great speed, he beheld a warrior, completely armed, who bore in his hand the renowned raven banner. The superstitious reverence with which this was regarded by the Northmen was well known to Edmund; and the loss of it would, he knew, more damp their spirits than the most complete overthrow in battle. As we have already intimated, this banner was supposed to be possessed of magical powers; to announce victory by the spreading of its wings; and to foretell, by the drooping of its head, when

disaster was at hand. It was said to have been the work of the three sisters of Hubbo, the daughters of Ragnar Lodbrog, in one noon tide: was beheld with great reverence, and never entrusted in battle, except to some chief of uncommon strength, skill, and courage. The raven had soared above a hundred fights, and had never been in danger of capture. Now, however, peril the most imminent threatened it: and it was by the command of Hubbo himself that the brave warrior who bore it had fled from the hopeless battle, that he might preserve this treasure, at least, from the spoiler. Amleth, the standard bearer, a tall and powerful man, had burst unharmed through all opposition, and was now with rapid strides hasting to place it in safety. He passed not far distant from Edmund, who, after a fierce contest with some flying Northmen, was now pursuing his way toward the thick of the battle, and longing to stand front to front against the terrible and abhorred Hubbo. The sight of the raven, whose gilded pole gleamed brightly to the moon as it passed him, instantly, however, changed his course; and

with all his speed he pursued, and soon overtook the bearer, who, hearing his footsteps close upon him, and discerning him at one glance to be an enemy, assailed him with a backward stroke of his sword, such as Edmund had never till then witnessed. His own was uplifted in anticipation of a blow, but it was beaten down, and his shield cut through till the sword of the Dane touched upon his gauntlet. Here then was an antagonist likely to put to proof the skill and strength which, among his own countrymen, Edmund had never found matched. Amleth still flew onward; for the preservation of the banner was of more importance than could be his success in fight with an enemy: and he calculated that probably his first greeting might have rendered a second unnecessary: but Edmund, with a fleeter foot, shot soon before him, and compelled him to turn aside; and ultimately to stop and defend himself.

"Hound of a Saxon!"—cried the Dane, as he drove the banner staff into the ground, and with the speed of thought brought down his shield, which had been thrust high up the arm near the

elbow, that he might freely grasp the flag,—"hound of a Saxon! thy moments shall soon be told. The curse of Odin upon thee for delaying me thus!—Ha! hast thou got it?"

As he spoke the last words, he discharged upon his enemy a tremendous blow, that made the shield ring again: but Edmund now, more on his guard, and better aware of the prodigious force of his antagonist, caught the blow upon the centre of his uplifted buckler, where its thickness and strength were far greater than at the rim, upon which the former stroke had alighted, —and in his turn discharged upon the Dane a blow which fell upon the helmet, and sent him staggering several paces backward. A second stroke, before the stunned senses of the Dane returned, drove him, after a giddy reel, to the ground; and Edmund sprang forward to seize upon his prize. But this was already in the hands of some flying Northmen, who had snatched it up as they passed, though they did not chuse to stop, and take part in the combat. They were, however, seen ere they had proceeded many paces; and the young Saxon was

instantly upon them. Bursting through those who were hindmost, Edmund struck down the soldier who carried the flag; and, dropping his shield, caught the pole before it fell with its bearer to the ground. Every sword was directly upon him; but his mail held him secure, while his opponents, common soldiers only, whose defensive armour was nothing better than a coat and helmet of thick leather, quite unable to resist a sword wielded by such an arm as his, fell at every stroke. The value of the prize alone could have made them, at such a moment, strenuous in their resistance against a man so much their overmatch in strength, and advantage of arms. Of the five who had first encountered him, two only were at length left; and these turned to flight, almost at the moment when his former, and more terrible adversary, Amleth,—having recovered from the stunning effect of the blows, which had cut through his steel helmet, and sent down his cheeks a gentle trickling of blood,—again, and with more bitter fury, advanced upon him. Edmund was now without his shield, which he had dropped at the instant

when he snatched the standard from the soldier, and which had been carried off by one of those who fled. Amleth appeared to be fully recovered; and the young Saxon began to doubt whether he should at last carry off his prize. He resolved, however, that nothing but death should make him surrender it; and bound himself up therefore for a desperate struggle. The thought, indeed, glanced through his mind, that he might avoid the combat, and secure the prize by swiftness of foot; but this was an expedient so galling to his pride, that he could not bow himself to it. These reflections, however, were the work of but a moment, in the interval betwixt the re-appearance of Amleth, and the instant attack which that formidable warrior made upon him.

The first motion of Edmund was to dart forward the pole of the banner in his left hand against the face of his enemy; and this he did with such rapidity and force, that, had the point held to the mark, this one blow would probably have decided the contest. But Amleth was now better aware of the adversary whom he had to

deal with, and active to ward against every attack. He saw, and with infinite nimbleness started to one side, and avoided the thrust. In the same moment he let fall a hissing blow which, though dexterously parried, by the sword of Edmund, glanced upon the strong pole of the banner, and shore it like a twig. The returning stroke of the Saxon was caught upon the shield of Amleth; but the admirable temper of the metal seemed proof against every force, and the blade jarred with a violence that threatened to shiver it.

In their shields and swords the Northern warriors were more particular than in any other part of their warlike accoutrements. The method by which they tempered their steel is unknown; but, like the heroes of Troy and Greece, they delighted in feigning their armour and weapons to be the work of supernatural powers, impassive, and irresistible, when opposed to any mere earthly material.* Against a sword and

* Their champions or heroes took particular care to procure very keen swords, which they inscribed with

shield of such formidable pretensions, Edmund had now nothing to oppose but a weapon con-

mysterious characters, and called by such names as might inspire terror.

The shields belonging to warriors of distinction were of iron or brass, ornamented with painting and sculpture, often finely gilt, and sometimes plated over with gold or silver. We have seen what great account the ancient Danes made of their shields, and what penalties were reserved for such as lost them in battle. Their shape and size varied much in different countries: the Scandinavians generally had them of a long oval form, just the height of the bearer, in order to protect him from arrows, darts, and stones. They besides made use of them to carry the dead to the grave, to terrify the enemy by clashing their arms against them, to form upon occasion a kind of shelter or tent when they were obliged to encamp in the open field, or when the weather was bad. Nor was the shield less useful in naval encounters; for if the fear of falling into their enemies' hands obliged one of their warriors to cast himself into the sea, he could easily escape by swimming upon his buckler.* Lastly, they sometimes made a rampart of

* Vid Holberg's Danem. og Norg. Beskrivelse, chap. xiii.

Plutarch in his life of Marius tells us, that the Cimbri when they were passing the Alps, took great delight in climbing up to

fessedly wrought by human hands; finely tempered, it is true, but, as he soon found, very in-

their shields, by locking them one into another, in the form of a circle; and at the end of a campaign, they suspended them against the walls of their houses, as the finest decoration with which they could adorn them.

All these uses which they made of their shields could not but inspire the Scandinavians with a high respect for this part of their armour. It was the most noble manner in which a hero could employ his leisure, to polish his shield to the utmost brightness, and to represent upon it either some gallant feat, or some emblematical figure expressive of his own inclinations or exploits: and this served to distinguish him when, being armed at all points, his helmet hid his face. But then every one could not carry these painted or carved shields indifferently. When a young warrior was at first enlisted, they gave him a white and smooth buckler, which was called the "Shield of expectation." This he carried till, by some signal exploit, he had obtained leave to have the proofs of his valour engraven on it: for this

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the tops of the mountains over the ice and snow, and there placing their broad shields under their bodies, would slide down those vast slippery descents.

Travellers inform us, that the same method of descending those snowy slopes is practised to this day.

ferior to that of his antagonist. The rest of his armour was, however, far superior to that of the Dane, or the contest might soon have terminated fatally to him. The helmet, and mail complete, had, it may be remembered, been the gift of Leofric, to whose great uncle,—a man of uncommon size and strength, and the devoted friend of young Egbert at the time when he fled to France to avoid the machinations of Brihtric, king of Wessex,—it had been presented by the emperor Charlemagne, whose banner he had followed through half the countries of Europe, and whose regard and admiration he had excited by many acts of heroic bravery. This armour was of Mi-

reason none but princes, or persons distinguished by their services, presumed to carry shields adorned with any symbol; the common soldiers could not obtain a distinction of which the grandees were so jealous. Even so early as the expedition of the Cimbri, the greatest part of the army, according to Plutarch, had only white bucklers. In following times, but not till long after, these symbols which illustrious warriors had adopted, passing from father to son, produced in the North, as well as all over Europe, hereditary coats of arms.—Mallet's Northern Antiquities, p. 202–3.

lan steel, engrained with gold; splendid at once, and of the most admirable temper. For this rare treasure Edmund had often been the envy of Sigifred, and other warriors, who had nothing of the kind to compare with it: and truly, it now stood him in good stead.

The second stroke of Amleth thundered upon his left side like the blow of a sledge hammer upon an anvil; but with as little effect, though the concussion made every bone in his body jar. It, however, made Edmund more fully aware of the disadvantage at which he fought from the loss of his buckler, and put him upon a more cautious method of fighting. The enormous skiold (so the Northmen termed the large shield) of his enemy covered him from head to foot; and it was only at the moments when he laid himself a little open in the act of striking, that the Saxon had any chance of reaching at the head, or the more pervious armour which covered the body of his foe. With astonishing dexterity he avoided, by rapid backward leaps, the blows that he feared too frequently to catch upon his sword, which seemed, at every

stroke that it met, to jar as if about to fly in shivers. Meantime he forgot not the use of his banner pole, about six feet of which still remained, and which he sometimes darted at the face of Amleth in a way that called for the most cautious guard on the part of the Dane. Every thrust of this novel weapon he instantly followed up by a sword stroke, aimed at whatever part seemed in the least exposed; and had already in this way inflicted two severe wounds upon the left thigh of the Northman, when his sword at length, as he had feared, in stopping a tremendous blow from that of his antagonist, broke short at the hilt, and the fragments clashed on the ground. The weapon of his enemy drove on unchecked, and fell upon the crest of the Saxon with a force that made him stagger. Amleth saw his advantage, and again lifted his dreadful weapon to end the combat. But, in confidence of victory, he forgot caution: turned aside his shield to give the full weight of his body to the blow, and in that instant Edmund darted forward his banner pole with the speed of light, struck him full on the brow, and drove

him without a struggle to the ground. The terrible sword which seemed to be descending like the messenger of death from that vigorous arm, dropped as if fallen from the fingers of an infant. The huge shield gave out a dull clang, as it sank with the body of its master heavily to the earth. Amleth neither stirred, nor breathed again. The banner pole had entered the forehead, and death followed on the instant.

It was not without a kind of pity that Edmund beheld the fall of so brave an adversary: but neither the time, the place, nor the occasion, permitted useless reflections. He seized the redoubted sword, and the impassive buckler, caught up the banner, a prize at once, and a weapon of worth, to him, and, at a pace that might allow him time to breathe and collect his strength, strode onward toward the place where the battle yet raged.

"Well for me," said he to himself, "that I did not, with that weak sword and buckler, encounter the gigantic Hubbo! But now, methinks, safely may I defy him, come he in what guise he may. Yet perchance he already may

have fallen beneath some more fortunate arm, or overwhelmed by numbers,—and the only vengeance that has ever moved me against man may be snatched from me. But no! hear I not his shout amid the tumult? Ha! 'tis the voice that rang first in my horrified ears, when the pavement of the monastery seemed to shake beneath his iron foot, and the hearts of the pious brethren sank within them. Oh! God!—if man may unblamed supplicate thee in such cause, —give now the strength of thunder to my arm: and let this monster fall before me!"

He shook the long and heavy sword as he moved onward, and it seemed, in his strong gripe, light as a twig. A Saxon soldier, bearing a torch, walked beside him: he looked upon the blade, and, surrounded by mysterious characters, read there engraved the word "Hela," Death.

"Death be thou then," said he, "to the wretch who, by a thousand crimes, hath justly forfeited the right to live!"

He looked upon the broad shield, and saw, rudely depicted there, deeds of battle; and, on

the top of all, a regal crown, giving intimation that its owner had claimed his descent from monarchs.

"A proud line then," said he, musingly, "hath haply had this night an obscure ending! But the peasant and the king must one day be of the same dust! Perhaps the sword of the descendant from mouldered monarchs may in this hour give another king to crumble in the common grave of all:—or I myself may haply be doomed to taste the last bitter draught; and the eyes of Elfrida, and of my beloved friend and monarch, may never again brighten upon me! But to thy hands, Great Disposer of all things! I commit myself!"

As he moved on, musing thus, he beheld, at a short distance before him, three Danish warriors, an old man, struggling between two youths who were forcibly compelling him to quit the field. The voice of the aged warrior was strained to the full pitch in heaping invectives upon his companions. Edmund paused a little while in the shadow of a tent, for his long journey of the day before, and his incessant and arduous

toil during the battle, had exhausted him so far as to make him desirous of a short rest before he should attempt a contest with the terrible enemy whom alone he longed to meet. He held the banner beneath his roomy shield to prevent it from attracting notice, and looked with some attention upon the advancing group.

"Quit my arms, ungrateful hounds that ye are!" cried the old warrior,—"I will not go with you. For threescore years have I mingled in the feast of swords, and never showed my back to an enemy: I will die as I have lived, in glorious battle."

"Nay,—come away," cried one of the youths, dragging him forward; "your arm is feeble now,—you cannot stand in such a field."

"Fool!" retorted the old man,—"if I cannot slay my enemy, I can die,—and then shall take my seat in Odin's hall at the eternal banquet of the brave. Force me not on, I command, I implore you. To die this night is to escape long misery. Never again could I shew myself amid Danish warriors, with the foul blot of shame upon my face! Boys,—ye have swords: go

with me back to fight,—and let us fall together. The warrior lives no longer than his good fame. To die in battle is to live glorious,—but to lead a life of shame, preserved by cowardly flight, is a long ignoble death. Unhand me Eric,—Harold,—why wilt thou aid thy brother in this unduteous and unmanly wrong."

"We cannot let you sacrifice yourself uselessly," returned one of them;—"All the young and strong are fled or fallen,—and it cannot then disgrace your grey hairs to leave the field."

"Bastards!" retorted the indignant chief, "for ye are no blood of mine. Did I ask you who had fled, or who had fallen? what is that to me? My part is to fight till my last drop of blood, and not to count the slain or the fugitives. Go then—save yourselves, cowards that you are! and leave me to die alone! By the halls of Odin! and the pit of Nastrond! I will go no farther!"

He flung himself down, as he spoke these words, and refused to take another step. The youths implored him to go with them, telling him that he would thus reserve to himself the

power of inflicting future vengeance upon his enemies: but no entreaties could rouse him. At this moment a sudden veering of the gentle wind brought with increased loudness the din of the battle; and the old warrior arose.

"The Saxon comes!" he cried: "Ha! now I hear their war-tools at hand. Tell me boys, tell me,—for my eyes in this dim light cannot see afar,—tell me when they are upon us, that I may strike one more stroke, and then lie down to rest as soldier ought. Now—now! Come they not nigh? Fight Harold! Eric fight!—Ha-ha! I shall die laughing then at last. Here Saxons! Haco calls—Haco defies you still. Ha-ha-ha-ha—" And the old man burst into a loud convulsive laugh.

The two youths appeared to be on the point of lifting him in their arms, when a powerful black horse, saddled and bridled, proudly arching his neck, snorting and turning his head from side to side, as he trotted majestically on, approached; and one of the youths, starting forward, and calling him by some name, which escaped the

ear of Edmund, caught with little difficulty the rein, and led him toward the old man.

"'Tis the horse of Sidroc," cried he, "You must up, and away to join him."

"Where fights the noble Sea-king then?" demanded Haco.

"At the farthest verge of battle: he summons you,—Away,—we will go with you and stand by your side."

"Praises to Odin!" ejaculated the pleased warrior; and put his foot into the stirrup. The two youths, one at his right knee, and one at the bridle of the horse, ran with him; and presently all were out of sight. The last words that Edmund heard were an assurance to the old man that they were going round the battle to join the Sea-king at the farther side: but their course was sea-ward; and Edmund had no doubt that the youths were hasting to their ships, which lay at the distance of a few miles. Subsequent events shewed him the truth of this conjecture.

Meantime, Edmund set forward toward the place of conflict; but noticed that the clash of

arms grew rapidly fainter and fainter as he advanced, and, ere he could arrive at the spot, had almost wholly ceased. The ground now began to shew a thick harvest of the slain; and the horrid spectacle made his blood run cold.

The watch-fires had been rekindled near this part of the field; and the moon cast a brighter light. Some tents farther onward were in a flame, whether by accident or design, and the red light flashed upon the armour of the warriors moving to and fro, and shewed the ghastly faces of the dead who lay near, and the ground glistening with blood. On the northern horizon, black clouds were piled, from which came at intervals a quivering gleam of lightning that kindled all the sky, and shewed at one glance the whole dreary plain, and far away the headlong rush of the flying Danes, the victor and the vanquished.

CHAPTER III.

Edmund's first object, now that the battle seemed almost ended, was to find Earl Oddune, and surrender to him the prize; but his entrance in the throng of the Saxons was not wholly without danger. The shield of Amleth, which had not been unnoticed in the earlier part of the battle, drew upon him many a fierce demand to yield himself; and, in one instance, was first greeted by the discharge of a heavy lance, which fell blunted at the foot of the bearer. The truth was, however, soon made known; and the prize which he displayed was hailed by shouts of joy and exultation. Attended by a gathering throng, he moved onward to the spot where yet there appeared some lingering of the contest; and, amid a crowd who formed a circle round them, beheld two warriors, each with his back against a broad elm tree, whom he at a

glance knew to be Sidroc and Hubbo. It seemed that these two only were left alive. They were separated from each other by about the distance of six spears' length; and the ground between them, and around the trunk of either tree, was rugged with roots that extended far, and presented themselves high above the surface, so as to render a near approach unsafe to the foot. The earth all around them was steeped with blood; and the bodies of the slain formed a kind of rampart for their defence. There was now a temporary pause from fight; and Earl Oddune, easily distinguishable by his armour and size of limb, was in a peremptory tone forbidding any man to hurl lance or shoot arrow at the two warriors, whom, in consideration of their rank and bravery, he desired to take alive. Both were drawing thick breath, and appeared almost exhausted; yet their reply to his demand to surrender was an instant and peremptory refusal, expressed by the one with curses and ungovernable rage,—by the other with calm and noble disdain. Both the demand and the refusal, however, were unheard by Edmund, and by all

near him, such was the irrepressible exultation at beholding in the hands of a Saxon the renowned raven standard which had led on the Northmen to so many conquests, and had so often inspired terror in their enemies. The tumult excited the anger of the fiery Oddune, who now turned upon the shouters, and, with a loud voice, commanded silence. Edmund advanced toward him, and presented the magical flag.

"By the right hand of God! young soldier," cried the Earl, his face kindling with pleasure as he eagerly grasped the prize, "thou hast done good work this night. But how camest thou then by this spoil? Was it found treasure, —or won by the sword?"

"Taken in fight," replied the youth. "The shield of the standard bearer is now upon my arm, and his good sword in my hand."

"With how many to aid thee?" demanded the Earl, smiling good humouredly. "Yon fellow who bore it made havoc among our men like a wild boar among hounds: and, though as bold-looking a soldier as any here, thou couldst scarce, methinks, have been singly a match for

that devil incarnate, who, as I think, was never surpassed, except perhaps by the two before us, who seem to have each of them a legion of devils within him. Some twenty years bygone I might have tried their metal myself; but my limbs are over rigid now, and I have no great desire to die before my fair time comes."

"It was my fortune," answered Edmund, to encounter the enemy alone. A brave man truly was he: but, by the blessing of God, I prevailed over him; and he now lies amid the slain."

"Beard of St Peter! youth, but thou mightest have stood the buffet with any champion of the Round Table at thy own years,"—exclaimed the Earl,—"and, if the whole twelve were alive again, I would desire no better knights than an equal number of thy pith to encounter them foot to foot. Thou and I must know each other better: and a reward worthy of thee shall, I trust, be thought of before the year is much older. Meantime, such as I can give shall be thine on the spot. Down on thy knee, and take knighthood from my sword on the field of battle: and that, let me tell thee, is a nobler

place for the reward of a brave man, than the palace of a king."

Edmund knelt; and the old Earl placed the sword upon his neck, and pronounced the words which conferred upon him the dignity of a Miles, or knight, in the brief way used upon the field, but which required to be afterwards confirmed by more formal ceremonials. * "And, were it in my power to give," added the chief, as Ed-

* The ceremony consisted of a confession and absolution of sins, on the day preceding the consecration; of watching in the church all the previous night, with prayers and humiliations; of hearing mass next morning; of offering his sword on the altar; of its being blessed by the priest; of its being then placed on his neck; and of his afterwards communicating. He was then declared a legitimate Miles.—Turner, Vol. iii. p. 142.

Another passage which alludes to the Anglo-Saxon chivalry is in Malmsbury, p. 49, in which he expressly declares that Alfred made Athelstane a Miles.

He says that Alfred, seeing Athelstane to be an elegant youth, prematurely made him a Miles, investing him with a purple garment, a belt set with gems, and a Saxon sword, with a golden shield.—Ibid.

mund rose, "I would confer upon thee an earldom more readily than this."

The countenance of the youth glowed with pleasure and noble pride. "There is one boon, my lord," he replied, "that I would beg of you: and for which, if you will grant it me, I shall feel more grateful than for any honour that could be bestowed."

"Name it," cried the Earl,—"By the graves of my fathers! if it be one in my power to grant,—and such as I can with honour allow,—for other thou wouldst not ask,—I swear to thee it shall be thine!"

"I would crave then," returned Edmund, "that the Sea-king Sidroc may be my captive, if he will yield himself to me, to be disposed of according to my own will, without question or hindrance of any man whatsoever,—and secondly, that I alone may be permitted to take vengeance upon the sanguinary Hubbo, if he will not submit, or to fall by his hands."

"Now, by the bones of the martyrs! youth, thou has preferred a no very wise request: and one that, for thy own good, I would gladly re-

fuse thee. For the dark warrior there, who hath this night made Saxon blood flow like a brook, at once I yield him to thee, if persuasion thou hast potent enough to bow him to thy will; though with equal chance of success, I trow, mayst thou think to bend the tree above him with thy breath: but, for the hell dog yonder,—stronger and fiercer than the arch fiend himself,—what, in the name of all that is reasonable, can move thee to peril thy life against him that is already in our power, without needing one drop more of blood to be shed for him? Say that he will not yield himself, a hundred spears may at once bring him down, without harm to a hair of ours: and why then should we needlessly risk the life of one who hath just done noble service, and given hope of yet higher things for his manly years? I cannot refuse the promise that I have given,—but, with as much pleasure as I received this prize at your hands, would I now hear you abandon the right to claim this boon of me. Think a little, my young friend,"—he continued, in a low tone, laying his nervous hand upon the arm of Edmund,—"and do not let pride, or over

exultation in your former victory, push you on to such madness. If you know your arm to be strong enough to hold a mad bull by the horns when the fury is on him, then, in God's name, get to your work, and let this arch devil incarnate be sent with all speed to his place: but, otherwise, be ruled by me, and forego such a mad freak as, twenty to one, must change your new-earned honour for a few feet of cold ground, —and that before you have worn it half an hour. Think then, my dear young friend; and, if you find nothing better than a little hot blood to push you on in this, why for God's sake, and your own sake, and my sake to boot,—for a sad heart should I have to see ill befal thee,—give up this foolish attempt, and content thyself with the dark Sea-king yonder, who, I swear to thee, shall be thine, to dispose of in what way soever thou wilt."

Respect for the years, and the kind intention of the majestic veteran, prevented Edmund from interrupting him; but, when the Earl paused, he replied with a tone and manner that denoted his resolve to claim the concession of the promised boon.

"No foolish pride, or boastfulness, my lord, moves me to this," he answered, "but the abhorrence of innumerable crimes, and the remembrance of cruelties that my own eyes witnessed, the most black, and perpetrated upon those who were the most dear to me, the most pious, the most unoffending. From the years of my boyhood has my soul thirsted to bring punishment upon that monster. I cannot,—I will not call it revenge. I ask no secret stroke—I offer my own life for the attainment of a purpose which appears to me righteous as the justice of heaven. If passion hath blinded me, then may God forgive the error! but I have rigorously questioned my own heart, and I believe that the impulse which forces me onward is the prompting of heaven; and that God will send down a guardian angel to my side, rather than suffer me to perish in so just a cause. Respectfully, my lord, I claim from you the completion of your promise."

He bowed as he concluded; and the Earl, letting go his arm, which he had continued to press with almost affectionate anxiety, answered,—"In the name of God then, take your own way!

Yet hearken, Sir Edmund: I have already offered to both the privilege of surrender; and my word must not be forfeited. If the warrior of the flame face there chuse to yield himself, I can permit no attack upon him. If he still hold out, then an open field and fair play shall be allowed; and God speed your arm, my boy. I can do no more."

"And no more do I ask of you, my lord,"—replied the youth; "save that you would please to give your orders for carrying the purpose into immediate effect."

"That shall be done instantly," said the Earl: "But are you well sworded? Your buckler, I see, is a true Northman:—and, curses on them! none so choice have we to show: but if your blade——"

"My sword," said the youth, "is that of the standard-bearer, and——"

"Nay, then," cried the Earl, "if that be it, the sword of St Peter himself could not do better for thee. Once more, God speed thee youth!"

He turned then away; and, having first bid

sound the trumpet to stop pursuit, made proclamation that no man, save Sir Edmund alone, should presume to meddle with the two warriors, who were consigned to the hands of that knight as the reward of his achievement. All were then commanded to fall back, and leave ample space for parley or for fight.

The two Northmen looked with surprise upon this proceeding, and seemed conjecturing what should ensue. Edmund first advanced toward Sidroc, who, at his approach, stepped forward, and raised his sword, the point of which had been resting upon the ground. At this hostile movement Edmund stopped,—sheathed his weapon, and held out his hand, in token of a peaceful intention.

"No treachery, Saxon!" said the Sea-king in a stern voice;—"Come not near me,—or expect thy fate."

"And if treachery I mean to thee, Earl Sidroc,"—replied the youth, "then let fate overtake me!"

He laid his shield upon the ground, and advanced another step. Sidroc looked fixedly up-

on him, but did not relax from his cautious position.

" Cunning will avail thee nought, Saxon,"—said he,—" I have heard the proclaim that dared to call us thy captives: but never shalt thou behold Sidroc in thy fetters. No iron, save that of the warrior, hath ever yet clasped his limbs,—and this sword shall rather drink the blood of its master than be surrendered to the hand of a conqueror. Come not then nearer. The tricks of war are no mystery to me; and thy stratagem will be foiled."

" I design no stratagem upon thee, Sidroc,"—returned the youth; " but I must approach nearer to thee."——He sunk then his voice to a lower tone, and added,—" I have that to say which I would not that others should hear. Pledge me thy word not to take advantage of me. I come unarmed to thee; keep thou thy weapon in thy hand; and if I show treachery towards thee, then bury it in my heart."

While speaking the last words, he unslung the belt from his shoulder, and laid down his sheathed sword upon the buckler. Sidroc in-

stantly returned his own to the scabbard, and himself advanced toward Edmund.

A loud cry from Hubbo followed this motion: "Ha! fool! Thou art in the toil! Keep out thy steel, man, or the bonds will be on thee in an instant!"

Sidroc held up his hand toward his companion, in token that he should be silent. "What!" roared Hubbo,—"Dost thou yield thyself? Nithing shalt thou be held, and infamous, till the day of doom! The curse of Odin upon thee! and the serpents of Nastrond prey upon thee for ever!"

"Peace! cried Sidroc, "and control your senseless fury. I yield to none."

Addressing himself then to Edmund in a low tone, "Thou art he who brought the queen Aslauga from the battle," he said,—"I knew thee not at first: nor know I yet wherefore thou didst that good deed: but sure I am thy soul is noble, and that thou harbourest no treachery against me. Speak then,—what wouldst thou have?"

"I owe thee a life, Earl Sidroc,"—was the

reply, "and I would give thee freedom, upon one condition."

"Ask me not to yield myself to thee, or to any man," returned the Sea-king; "A thousand deaths were easier than that infamy. How thou canst owe to me a life, I know not. Unfold thyself, and name the condition of my freedom."

"The queen then hath not spoken with thee," said the youth. "Rememberest thou, Earl Sidroc, the slaughter at the monastery of Croyland?"

"I do;" replied the Northman; "Many such, —too many,—have I since witnessed,—but this hath not been forgotten."

"Thou hast not then forgotten," continued the Saxon, "that one child was rescued by thee from the carnage—"

"A golden-haired boy," said the Northman; "assuredly I have not forgotten him: he called himself Edmund. What then of him: was he thy son? yet thou art too youthful far,—thy brother perchance—or what?"

"I am myself that boy," returned Edmund.

The Northman started with surprise.

"Thou he? Impossible! He was but a red cheeked child,—and thou——I saw the shield of Amleth upon thy arm,—a better soldier never drew sword,—and I heard that by thee was the Raven banner captured from him: do not mock me Saxon."

He spoke the last words reproachfully, and gently turned aside his head, with an air of displeasure on his brow.

"By the faith of man!" said the youth, "I tell thee true. I was then in my eleventh winter,—eight have since elapsed. Think of Rolf,—of the gold-tressed queen,—of her gentle child,—of my terror to meet the brutal Hubbo,—of the death of the wretched man, smothered in the quagmire,—the bridge of the Nen,—the escape to the wood,—the vain search for me,—the bread and goat's flesh tied to the pole, lest I should be famished with hunger."

"Thou tellest me truths indeed," said Sidroc,—"and, by such light as now shows me thy face, right well can I suppose that thy features may be the full blown flower from that bud. Yet, Gods above! what change is here! Once

then hath the Odinsee bull seen with prophetic eye! 'Take heed,' said he, 'lest this worm become a dragon upon thy hand.'—Be thou then he. I saved thy life, and now thou wouldst save mine;—so runs thy wish; and it speaks nobly for thee. But how? What the condition? Remember thou talkest to one with whom honour is more prized than a thousand lives. Much do I owe thee:—the preservation of the queen this night a hundred fold o'erpays all that to me thou owest for a life snatched from the sword of yon mad drunkard,—and more to thee would I accord than to any man who breathes:—yet bethink thee Saxon,—if thy tame Christian creed can permit such feeling to enter thy soul,—bethink thee that, to a son of Odin, a life of countless ages, and the treasures of the whole earth, would offer no balance for the loss of honour."

"Hear me," said Edmund, "and then reflect. Yon Saxons are impatient, and our interview must draw to a close."

"Speak then at once; and I will as promptly reply to you," said the Sea-king.

"The fortune of war," resumed Edmund,

" hath this night given to my hands the Raven banner; and the boon granted to me by our leader for this act is, that you shall be resigned to my sole disposal. I am grateful to Earl Sidroc; and, while I lament that he should be one of a lawless race, I see in him a proud and noble nature, shining resplendent as a bright star amid clouds: but I love my country, and deeply do I feel for the misery which his arm hath aided to inflict upon her. I would preserve my generous protector at the peril of my own life,—but I cannot give him back to be again the scourge of my brethren. I would say to Earl Sidroc, 'take life and freedom,'—but I must have from him in return a pledge that he will quit this island, or never again draw his sword against her. Sidroc, you have heard my condition. The queen is, I trust, in safety: you shall be guarded to your ship: will you depart, and pledge me your word never again to molest this land?"

He paused, but the Northman made no immediate reply. "Will you remain with us in peace?" resumed Edmund: "Will you lay aside the sword, and dwell among us as among your

countrymen? The king himself hath heard the good deed of Earl Sidroc; and will give to him lands, and protection, and hold out to him the hand of friendship. Not ignorantly and rashly do I speak: from my own lips hath he heard the generous act of my preserver, and——"

"Fame speaks him dead," said the Sea-king.

"Not three days have yet elapsed," replied Edmund, "since I myself parted from him. For the fulfilment of that which I have promised on his behalf——"

"Stay," said Sidroc; "yon hounds are clamorous to see the fool caught in the trap: they look to see you clasp me by the waist, and throw me upon the ground that they may rush in, and put the cords upon my arms. Hear then my words. The time hath been when the din of battle was sweeter in my ears than the music of the cunning harper, or the voice of the maiden whom I loved: but I thought then only of its glory, and strove to blind my eyes to its horrors. Still at the clash of arms doth my heart bound within me, as a battle steed starts at the blast of a trumpet: but I no longer crave the fight for

glory alone, having seen the wretchedness that follows it: and, for vengeance upon the land that put to a horrid death the illustrious Ragnar,—that hath long since been satisfied,—and was perhaps, at best, but a vain dream. I have been taught from infancy that the renown of warlike deeds was the sole object worth living for;—but other thoughts have at times arisen within me; and my heart hath misgiven me for the deeds in which I have been a sharer. I have thought of justice, and of human tenderness; and I have said to myself, 'can it be the will of Odin that men should live but to the one purpose of mutual slaughter?' Saxon, the time hath been when I have wished that I could believe in your Christian creed; and lay down the sword without the reproach of impiety towards the gods. But what avails now to speak of these things? You offer me freedom without dishonour: you call not upon me to surrender my sword, or to acknowledge submission: you claim but from me that the life which you give should not longer be a scourge upon your country. If I refuse your boon, you cannot save my life,—if I accept it, I may yet

render service to my country, by striving to direct her energies to more worthy purpose, though I cannot aid her to ravage and destroy. Understand I rightly, Sir Edmund, the conditions which you offer?"

"Even so," replied the youth; "and, for the fulfilment of them on my part, I pledge to you all that is honourable among men, and sacred among Christians!"

"I accept your boon," said the Sea-king, with a noble serenity,—presenting at the same time his hand to the Saxon: "and I pledge you on my part the word of one who has never forfeited his promise that, under the conditions named, I will never again, save in self-defence, draw sword against the inhabitant of this land. Lead me now to your chief, and let his voice confirm your word. I will then instantly set forth to my ship, where the queen is already, I trust, in safety,—and depart for my own land."

Edmund cordially returned the pressure of the Northman; threw then the sword belt over his shoulder; lifted his shield,—and, putting his arm within that of his companion, moved forward to-

ward the Earl, who stood a little in front of the rest, awaiting the result of the conference. They had not, however, proceeded more than two steps before Sidroc,—whose attention was recalled to Hubbo by a furious vociferation from that warrior, indignant at this apparent submission of the Sea-king,—stopped short, and demanded whether Hubbo were to have the same offer of freedom under the same condition.

"Of a truth, no!" replied Edmund; "As soon would I put my hand into the jaws of the wolf, and trust that I should not feel his fangs."

"What then," said the Sea-king, with a darkened brow, "do you propose? I cannot, Sir Edmund, abandon my companion in arms, worthless though he be, and himself the cause of all this overthrow. Is he not also at your unfettered disposal? so methought was it proclaimed;—and surely did I deem that the alternative offered to me would be his also."

"The terms," returned Edmund, "cannot be the same, where the parties are opposite as night to day. To Sidroc I owe gratitude for my life preserved,—to Hubbo inextinguishable hatred

for the slaughter of those who were dearest to me: in Sidroc I am compelled to admire much that is noble,—in Hubbo I can find nothing but what arouses abhorrence: in the word of one I can fearlessly confide,—in the oath of the other I can trust as in the writing upon the sand. No, Earl Sidroc! The offer to yonder savage will be life with submission. If he scorn this, then from my hand will he, I trust, receive the punishment for a life of crime and cruelty!"

"Thou play the hangman's part?" cried Sidroc, with a start of surprise and indignation.

"No Sidroc," replied the Saxon,—"in fair battle, hand to hand, shall he meet me: and, if I fall, then in the hands of others rests his fate. The boon which I craved of my chief was the sole disposal of yourself; and the right to stand singly in combat with Hubbo, should he still refuse to submit. To grant him freedom is not within my power, and could never be my wish. The privilege that I claim is but to chastise him, or to fall by his hands. Let not him, the brutal, and the treacherous, be a bar to the path that with honour you may tread. Think of your

beautiful and noble queen;—think of the good that you may work for your country; and depart at once. The fate which neither you nor I can avert from him, Hubbo must be content to endure. Life will still be offered to him; and, if he refuse to accept it, with himself alone must rest the blame."

"I would this had been otherwise;" said the Sea-king, "but I cannot remedy the evil, and must submit. Yet surely you will not be mad enough to oppose your single arm against the strength and fury of Hubbo. Grievously shall I lament, young Saxon, if ill should befall you. Bethink you, ere too late; and do not encounter almost certain destruction for the hope of inflicting with your own hand that vengeance which, without peril to yourself, must too surely fall upon your enemy."

"Persuade me not, Sidroc;" said the youth impatiently; "on this point alone am I deafer than the rock. That which is decreed will be; and I am resigned to my fate, be it what it may. Come away then; and let me see you at liberty;

that, if I fall, I may at least die satisfied to have preserved the life of my early protector."

"You will perish, Sir Edmund,"—returned Sidroc, with an expression of deep regret: "Abandon your mad purpose, I still implore you. But, if you will persist, I cannot remain to witness your death. Conduct me therefore to your chief; and let me hasten from this fatal spot."

They moved together then to the Earl; and Sidroc himself, with a calm and fearless tone, announced to him the conditions upon which freedom had been offered, and accepted; and demanded from him a confirmation of them, and a permission to pass immediately, and unmolested, from the field. Oddune was no little surprised at the terms prescribed by Edmund; but instantly pronounced his sanction of them; and commanded a captain, with some score of soldiers, to conduct the Sea-king safely beyond the camp. Edmund then bade Sidroc farewell; and the latter, grasping the hand of the youth, again urged him to abandon his purpose upon Hubbo. The refusal of Edmund was firm; and the Sea-king

saw that all attempt to change his intention must be vain.

"Farewell then, generous Saxon,"—he said,—"so little known, yet so well beloved: we part for ever! May the blessing of all Gods, whether of thy belief or mine, be evermore with thee!"

"And with thee, noble Sidroc;" returned the youth. "Commend me to the gentle Aslauga: and, should we ever meet again, let it be as brethren and friends. Farewell!"

With these words they parted. Edmund stood a short time, watching the receding figure of the majestic chief; then, after a few words to Earl Oddune, advanced toward the furious Hubbo, who with the bitterest execrations still assailed the departing Sea-king.

The eyes of all were fixed with intense anxiety upon the bold youth, as he moved toward the terrible Northman. The boon which had been granted to him by the Earl was speedily made known, and the throng of spectators continually thickened; while their interest in the impending event continued with every moment

to increase. Even the most avaricious of the plunderers desisted from their pleasant task as the crisis drew near, and crowded with breathless earnestness to witness it. Few, however, were there who augured success to the over bold Saxon; and many were the whispers, as he passed, advising him to forego the attempt. Earl Oddune himself again with earnestness conjured him to think better of it, and leave the ferocious Northman to receive his fate from the hands of others,—but his resolution was unalterable, and he continued to advance, till he had arrived within a few yards of his enemy.

Hubbo had, by this time, ceased from his vociferations after the Sea-king; and, with a fixed eye, like that of a bull about to rush forward at his mark, watched the approach of the Saxon. It was with mingled and inexpressible feelings that Edmund found himself, as an open enemy, in the presence of the loathed, but terrific Dane. He looked on his fierce countenance, and measured with his eye the gigantic limbs of the unmoving chief, whose heavy mace, resting on the ground, but firmly grasped in his nervous right

hand, seemed reposing only that it might strike the surer and deadlier blow. Edmund felt no fear; yet such was the agitation of his feelings, that his limbs were seen to tremble, and his face to wax pale; and all who beheld expected that he would even then abandon his mad project, or too surely become an almost instantaneous victim. But his voice was loud and firm as he now proceeded to summon the Northman to submit.

"Monster!" he cried, "by whose crimes this land hath been for years polluted,—once more are you offered the life which you so ill deserve. Throw down your arms, and submit yourself vanquished,—then may you still breathe on through a few years of infamy;—refuse this mercy, and your doom is at hand."

While he spake this, Edmund fixed his eye upon that of Hubbo, cautious to read every indication of hostile intent; and became almost immediately assured that such was forming in the breast of his treacherous enemy.

"Saxon cur!" cried the Dane, foaming with

rage, "to such a demand Hubbo has but one reply: take it thus!"

Lifting his mace as he pronounced the last word, he sprang forward, and discharged a whirlwind stroke which, had his antagonist been less active, or less on his guard, might at once have terminated the combat. But Edmund leaped to the left from the thundering weapon; and, passing behind with the speed of thought, let fall upon the undefended right side of the Dane a stroke so tremendous that the corslet gaped, and the blood burst forth in a thick stream. A loud shout hailed the blow: but Edmund was not thrown off his guard by untimely exultation. A hideous stroke, as Hubbo threw round the whole weight of his body, instantly replied; and with such quickness that the youth could not wholly avoid it. The mace struck upon the central point of the buckler with a violence that drove it from the grasp of the bearer, and sent it with a loud clang to the earth, almost at the feet of the spectators. The arm of Edmund was benumbed; and dropped strengthless: but the returning blow was given almost

before the shield had reached the ground. Lighting on the left shoulder of the Northman, the keen steel again bit deep through the armour, —again the red stream gushed forth,—and again the shout of the Saxons arose. The fury of Hubbo now became madness. Pressing upon his foe, roaring aloud, and raining down to right and to left his hideous blows, he seemed resolved to annihilate the man who, singly, had hitherto so foiled him. Nothing but the utmost presence of mind, and quickness of eye and foot, could have preserved the Saxon against so tremendous a weapon, wielded by such an arm. It was impossible for him, in the brief interval betwixt the blows of his fell adversary, to attempt, without imminent peril, any assault in return. Leaping now backward,—to this side now,—and now to that,—he evaded, though in momently peril of a fatal end, the blows against which no shield, and no armour could have defended him. But he saw the red stream flowing down on either side of the Dane, and expected with every passing instant that strength would fail him. No sign of this, however, appeared, though the

breath of the gigantic foe became thick and frequent; and the impatient and fiery youth could with difficulty restrain himself to a merely defensive contest so long protracted. Already had he trodden with backward step thrice round the ring of silent spectators, and still the frenzied Northman, with strength unabated, was following. During all this time, the Saxon had not once ventured to attempt a blow upon him, since the mere instant of delay necessary might have exposed him to the sway of that ponderous club, which would have needed no second stroke. At length, however, he darted forward at the instant that the mace had passed him, lightly touching upon his breast-plate,—and struck with collected force at the uplifted right arm of the Dane. The sword missed its mark, but lighted upon the thick handle of the mace, and shore it in two, close to the gripe. Down dropped with a dead weight the now harmless weapon; and the silence of the field changed to a thunder-burst of applause. But the sword of Hubbo was instantly forth, and his savage roar resounded above the tumult. Yet not so quick was his

motion, but that Edmund, ere the blade of his adversary was drawn, had discharged a second stroke, which, alighting upon his breast-plate, close below the neck, burst through the iron cavity and inflicted another, and a wider, though slighter wound. But the Saxon was without his buckler, while that of the Northman was on his arm, and the contest appeared still likely to be unfavourable to him. Far superior skill in the use of his weapon,—equal strength, and greater agility, were, however, more than a counterbalance for this deficiency. He was also unhurt, save from the benumbing blow upon the shield, the effect of which was rapidly diminishing, and was comparatively fresh, and unfatigued, while his antagonist, wearied by the unceasing motion of his heavy club, and now somewhat exhausted by loss of blood, stood with wild eye and heaving chest, like a wild beast pursued almost to the extremity. His quick and heavy blows attested, nevertheless, the vigour of his gigantic arm; and all the address of his foe was necessary to parry the strokes which unfailingly answered his own loud

thunderings upon the clanging and almost impenetrable shield. Yet well did the sword of Amleth do its work; and the buckler, that had never till then given way, was twice riven by the griding edge. Edmund now began to press forward, and his huge foe, step by step, to give back. But this lasted not long: recovering breath, the Dane again bore onward; and planted at length upon the crest of his enemy a blow that drove him on one knee to the earth, and for the moment stupified his senses. The exulting Northman repeated the stroke, and thought his victory sure: but Edmund turned aside the descending blade; and, rising, let fall upon the arm of Hubbo a blow that made the weapon drop from his grasp. Had not the sword fallen flat, the arm might have been severed from the shoulder: or, had Hubbo stooped to pick up the fallen weapon, a second blow might have sent him down never again to rise: —but the numbness passed instantly from his hand; and flinging aside his shield, he rushed in for a close grapple with his now better provided enemy. Clasping him round the waist, he strove

to hurl the Saxon to the ground, that he might afterwards dispatch him with the dagger: but here the Northman found himself overmatched: and, after a short struggle, was hurled backward to the ground, with a clang that was distinctly heard by the farthest spectator. Both fell; but the Northman was undermost, and lay without motion, and, for a few moments, without breath. Edmund started up from him, and caught the sword which, at the commencement of the struggle, he had let fall. Tremendous peals of applause bespoke the joy of the Saxons; and a hundred voices called out to him to dispatch the Dane before he could rise. But Edmund planted his left foot upon the breast of Hubbo; and, pointing the sword at his throat, bade him call upon God for pardon before his soul was sent to its final account. Hubbo still lay for a time without stirring, or speaking; then at length, in a low and faint tone, scarcely unclosing his eyes, said—"Use thy advantage, Saxon: I have nothing to pray for. I die in battle,—the last warrior upon a bloody field,—and the hall of

Valhalla is open to receive me. Bury thy sword in me, therefore, and let me be gone."

He was then silent,—closed his eyes, and lay without motion, save of his huge chest, which rose and fell, like a smith's bellows, to his deep and frequent breathings. Edmund looked upon him for a time in silence. The light of the moon, the bright flare of the watch-fires, and of a hundred torches which, from the beginning of the combat, had blazed round the ring, shewed distinctly his horrid countenance, on which approaching death seemed as yet to have made slight alteration.

"And hast thou then no crimes for which to implore forgiveness?" said Edmund at length: "Have not the strengthless old man, and the innocent child, and the helpless woman, and the meek servant of God, fallen before thy ruthless arm?—Have not the virgin, and the chaste matron, held up the imploring hand to thee in vain?—Have not the aged, and the young, groaned under thy tortures, that thou mightest force from them the treasure which they knew not of?—Have not thy fires consumed the church,

and the monastery, and the dwellings of the rich, and of the poor?—Have not thy ruffians driven back the shrieking victims to perish amid the flames?—Hath not thy sword hewed down at the altar, and upon the tomb, the tender child, and the grey-headed monk?—And are these deeds not to be repented of? And dost thou hope that a life of blackest guilt can be rewarded by eternal bliss in the hall of thy false God?"

He spake this slowly, and sternly, and with a long interval after every question, that the Northman might have time to reflect: but Hubbo still remained silent, and without change, save that his breath became gradually more slow and calm.

"Rememberest thou not, wretch that thou art!"—he at length resumed, "when thy sword cut down at the altar, and while the blessed cross was in his withered hand, the pale grey-headed prior of Croyland! Hast thou forgotten how the old and feeble brethren, and the shrieking children, fell before thee there? Canst thou not even now hear the groans and the wailings of them whom thy inhuman cruelty put

to the keen torture? Fiend that thou art! bethink thee of these things, and pray that thy own torments may not be everlasting."

Again he paused; but the Dane made no reply.

"Little didst thou think, proud man! that among the children of that devoted abbey stood one destined to be thy punisher. Yes, imperious and invincible prince! the boy whom Sidroc preserved from thy fury now stands with his foot upon thy breast, and with the sword of vengeance in his hand."

The eyes of Hubbo, at these words, opened for a moment, and shot a glance like fire upon the Saxon; then again half-closed, as if they felt the stealing hand of death. With a low, faint voice, he at length began to speak.

"My crimes stand up before me now—I feel, I feel that I have indeed deserved punishment: and from thy hand comes it most justly, and most welcome. But dost thou, Saxon, indeed believe that prayer to thy God might save me now in this last moment?"

"The mercy of God is infinite," returned

Edmund; "but He alone can judge with what measure to visit thy guilt. Bow thy soul into the dust; and put up thy prayers to Him,—so may this infliction be softened unto thee. Few, very few are thy moments;—lose not one, lest thou with that lose eternity."

"I feel cold death at my heart;" said the Dane with a feeble voice; "raise me upon my knees; and let me pray unto the Christian's God, even as they pray unto him."

As he said this he attempted to rise, but instantly fell back. Edmund laid his sword upon the ground; and, placing his hand under the shoulders of the Dane, lifted him till he had gained his knees. He was still supporting him in that position when Hubbo started up,—drew his dagger,—and with a shout of devilish exultation rushed upon the youth. With the speed of thought Edmund caught up his sword; and, in the frenzy of rage, let fall upon the impious hypocrite a blow so tremendous and well-aimed that the severed head dropped upon the ground, while the dagger yet glittered in the uplifted

hand. The huge trunk stood yet an instant,—then sank in a heap.

There had been a grave-like stillness amid the throng of Saxons; but now they sent up continued peals of joy, and, with one impulse, rushed forward. Edmund felt heart-sick at sight of the gushing body: he sheathed his sword; placed on his arm the shield; which had been brought to him by a soldier;—and, after listening to the congratulations of Earl Oddune, and the mingled applause of all, requested permission to retire to the castle. This was immediately granted; and he soon found himself stretched upon a couch, appointed for him by the Earl, in a chamber near to his own. But sleep did not speedily visit him. The blows which he had received on the helmet had left considerable contusions, attended by loud noises in the head, that seemed to him like the ringing of shields: and the real sounds from the camp below, where the work of plunder was going joyously on,—the shoutings,—and, at one time, the clashing of arms, as though some new contest

had arisen,—contributed also to banish slumber. The day had dawned before his eyelids closed, —and, when he awoke, the sun was high in the heavens.

CHAPTER IV.

A SOLDIER, who, on the preceding night, had been appointed by Earl Oddune to attend upon Edmund, and who had slept on an humble couch in the chamber, assisted him to put on his armour, and informed him, the while, of matters which filled him with agitation. Edmund, he said, had scarcely reached the castle after the combat, when Earl Sidroc again came to the camp, in fierce wrath at the loss of his queen, and her daughter Windreda, who had been retaken by Sir Beornwulph, aided by Sigifred, and Cynegils, with a party of soldiers. This the Sea-king held to be a breach of the conditions entered into betwixt Edmund and himself; and with a haughty and angry tone demanded therefore that they should be restored to him. But this had been insultingly refused by Beornwulph, and his two friends; and the consequence was

an instant attack upon them by the enraged Sea-king; who, after desperately wounding Cynegils, and slaying several soldiers that had taken part against him, was struck down by Beornwulph, who came behind him with a battle-axe, while three or four others were assailing him in front. The blow had effectually stunned him: his limbs were bound before his senses returned; and he was instantly conveyed to the castle, where he still remained till such time as Sir Beornwulph should return to claim his prisoner, or to put him publicly to death. The queen and her daughter, guarded by Beornwulph, Sigifred, and a few soldiers, had just set forth, as was said, to a castle belonging to the former, and situated about a day's journey off, toward the south-east.

Edmund heard this tale with intensest feeling: he said little; but enquired the place where Sidroc was confined, and the direction of the Castle of Beornwulph. He was just quitting the chamber when a soldier came to inform him that Earl Oddune had risen, and was inquiring for him. Edmund replied that he would speed-

ily attend upon the Earl; and then hasted forth, guided by his attendant, toward the dungeon of Sidroc. He had not proceeded many steps when another soldier accosted him, to say that a man, in the dress of a peasant, or mechanic, had been impatiently inquiring for him, and could scarcely be kept from his chamber.

"I have matters of importance at present upon my hands," was the reply, "and cannot speak with him."

The soldier bowed and retired; and Edmund moved onward. But he had not taken many paces when the quick tread of feet was heard behind; and the impatient visitor bounded before him in the shape of the unlucky brother Elf.

"I have travelled far, and speedily, Sir Edmund," cried the little monk, with a face lighted up with gladness. Edmund stood at this moment on the upper stair of the flight which led down to the castle dungeon. He stopped one moment,—shook his old acquaintance by the hand,—told him he could not then speak with him,—bade him await there his return,—and then with hasty steps descended. But he paus-

ed ere half way down,—stood for a short time in deep thought,—then sprang up again, and whispered something in the ear of the monk.

" Any thing that I can do," said the latter, with evident delight; " and let me tell you I am no bad judge of horse-flesh neither."

" Hush," said Edmund; then whispered,—put into the monk's hand a heavy purse,—again descended; and passed instantly into a cold, subterraneous vault, of which the door had been opened for him by three soldiers, armed with long axes, who stood there to guard the prisoner.

Edmund cast round his eye, after the door had been closed upon him, and for a time saw nothing but a " darkness visible." A single lamp gave out a dull beam which, to him who had just passed from the full light of day, seemed feebler than the glowworm's fire. The extent of the vault was quite viewless to him; and he looked vainly for the object of his search. But there were other eyes there, now accustomed to the dull light, which instantly beheld and knew him.

"We meet soon again," said the voice of the Sea-king, rolling its deep base around the echoing walls: "but I blame not you."

"In the name of God!" cried Edmund, "where are you, Earl Sidroc? and in what horrid place confined!"

"I am here,—approach me, and see."

"I can see nothing," returned Edmund, "and your voice seems to speak on every side of me."

"Take then the lamp, and come forward,—I cannot advance to meet you."

Edmund took up the lamp, whose low flame appeared almost expiring, and, with a cautious tread, walked in the direction whence the voice appeared to proceed. He beheld at length a couch of straw, and thereon the stately Sea-king, bound hand and foot with thongs of leather, and utterly unable to move.

"The barbarians!" he ejaculated, "this shall never be, though I myself should be thrown in the same bonds!"

Without delay then he drew forth his dagger, and cut asunder the thongs. The Sea-king

started upon his feet, and warmly grasped the hand of his deliverer. "But there are fetters," he said, with a deep and anguished tone, "harder than these to sever; and that cut deep into my soul. Aslauga and her beautiful daughter are in the hands of the ravisher."

"I know all;" said Edmund, "but you shall not abide long here. I will instantly to the Earl, and demand your release according to the tenor of his promise to me."

"Hope nothing from him," replied the Sea-king,—"he himself pronounced this doom upon me: one whom I grievously wounded is his brother's son; and they who captured me received from him a solemn promise to hold me safe till themselves should return to demand me of him. But my enemies are also yours. A dark-haired youth, whom I understood to be son of some powerful noble, charged you in my hearing with the crime of intended murder: and the Earl Oddune was stirred mightily against you. Other things he said bitterly, which I repeat not to you. Oddune will grant you no favour; and has repented him of some honour

which he last night conferred upon you. If in him rest all your hopes for me, think not further of them: they are gone like the mists of yesterday. But something thou mayest do. Leave thy dagger with me, and I can be my own deliverer from this shameful bondage."

"Not so, Earl Sidroc," replied the youth: "Your creed teaches you that self-slaughter is pleasing to the gods; but mine tells me that the one only God abhors, and will severely punish it."

"Then is your God a tyrant!" said the Sea-king, "and not the merciful——"

"Forbear, Earl Sidroc,"—cried Edmund, interrupting him; "I cannot give ear to language like this;—enough that, though I will not hesitate to peril my life for you, I cannot, and will not, put into your hands the means of self-destruction. Neither will such, I trust, be necessary for your deliverance. But are we alone here?—for even yet I see not the limits of this dark dungeon."

"Be assured," replied Sidroc, "that no living thing, save the toad or the newt, is with us. Many weary hours have I lain here; and the

darkness is now but as a dull daylight to my eyes, which behold with distinctness every massive stone, and every rusted ring and chain."

"Listen then to me," said the youth. "A friend without is now providing horses, which will wait for us at the eastern foot of the hill. He will return to give me notice when all is prepared. We will then rush from the door,—seize upon the soldiers on guard; and hurry them to this dungeon, where they can give no instant alarm to intercept our flight. Small fear of their remaining long in confinement; and they can incur no punishment, since they can be charged with no neglect. But remember,—no unneeded violence must be used toward them. We will then walk boldly through the eastern gate, —or, if opposed there, leap down from the outward battlement, a height of some twelve feet only,—descend the hill,—spring on our horses, —and away before there is time for pursuit. And truly, Earl Sidroc, I think, that when you and I are once fairly on horseback together, with our swords in our hands, not many will venture upon a task of such peril. But we will ourselves

be pursuers. The road taken by the brutal captor of your queen and daughter is known to me: scarce an hour has passed since his departure, and he cannot travel with much haste:—we shall then quickly overtake him: he has with him a young noble, and a few soldiers;—such will be no match for us;—the queen and her daughter shall be rescued,—and we will instantly make all speed for your ships. Tell me now, what think you of this?"

"As of the plan of a bold and generous spirit," replied the Sea-king, his dark eyes flashing to the feeble ray of the lamp,—"well conceived, and of likely issue. Yet hear me now, Sir Edmund. The promise that I gave you to forbear hostilities upon your countrymen, stood upon conditions which have been broken. I recall it,—for this outrage shall not pass unpunished."

"Stay there, Earl Sidroc," said the Saxon; "The deed has been the work of a few only,—and shall I for this let loose a powerful enemy to be the scourge of my whole country?"

"The act," returned Sidroc, "was done by a few, but the sanction of your chief has made it

that of all. After such injury, I cannot with honour pledge myself to wear a sheathed sword. The actual ruffian must at least meet his reward, or every breath of shameful and constrained peace will be worse to me than this dungeon damp. When that vengeance is satisfied, I will again consider our compact: and not sorry shall I be if my heart tell me that I may with honour retire from the turmoil of war, and pass my days in quiet, and in the land that gave me birth. More I will not concede, though the next moment should threaten me with death for the refusal."

He spoke in a tone that made Edmund feel his resolution to be unalterable; and for a time both remained in silence.

"You place me," said the youth at length, "in a situation of perplexity and danger. I dwell not on the loss of consideration among those with whom I now am,—since to effect your escape, on the conditions fore agreed upon, would be an act honourable in my own eyes, and justifiable, I trust, in those of my royal master and friend. Yet even of this I cannot be assured,—

since my enemies will, by such a deed, become many, and powerful, and may shut the heart of the king against me. This peril would I, not the less, encounter for your sake. But, to release you as the avowed foe of my countrymen, must bring upon me my own censure, and the everlasting hatred and hissing of all mankind. I have but just gained honours which I would gladly enjoy,—I have prospects of happiness which I cannot abandon, unless as a martyr to some just and holy cause. This is not such.—Earl Sidroc, we must part, and meet each the fate allotted to him. But I will yet pursue the brutal Beornwulph," he added, after a pause,—"and deliver your queen and daughter from his hands, or perish in the attempt: Sidroc, farewell."

"Farewell, generous Saxon," said the Sea-king, warmly returning the pressure of Edmund's hand, "farewell! Yet let me remind you, Sir Edmund, that, in restoring Sidroc to his countrymen, you may the best serve your own. The conditions that I have demanded, I will never abandon;—yet, bethink you that, in giving Sidroc

his liberty, you impose a fetter upon your enemies. The ferocity that he has often curbed,—that now perchance he might more than ever desire to restrain,—will in his absence rage with redoubled fury. Sidroc has delighted in the glory of battle,—but he has ever loathed and condemned cruelty and massacre. He has given fury to the fight,—but counselled mercy to the vanquished. The vengeance that he now demands *must* be granted him,—and his after course *must* be left free. Even for the Saxon, may it haply so be best. But take your choice, Sir Edmund: my own resolve is fixed."

There was a short pause; and Edmund then replied. "Were he other than Earl Sidroc who spoke thus to me, I would trample on such proposal: from him it comes as from one who scorns deceit, and will give in the act that which he withholds in the promise. I believe that you have the better judged. If, Sidroc, I submit to the terms that you now dictate, I shall not vainly look for a forbearance on your part toward my countrymen, proportioned to the sacrifice that I make in your own cause."

"The capture of the Raven banner," said Sidroc, "and the defeat of the most powerful of our Sea-kings in single combat,—will wash out the offence of having given liberty to an injured captive: or, if I thought otherwise, be assured, young Saxon, that foot of mine should never stir with you from these walls."

"Say no more," cried Edmund. "One condition in return, I demand of you,—and it must be granted."

"Name it," said the Sea-king.

"The dark-haired young noble who, in your hearing, dispraised me to Earl Oddune, is my friend——"

"Impossible!" cried Sidroc.

"I repeat it, he is my friend, though now stirred against me. He is, moreover, the brother of one who is to me dearer than all the world beside."

"Go on," said the Sea-king.

"This youth is, as I am told, among those who bear off your queen and daughter."

"If he have laid an injurious hand upon one hair of their heads," cried Sidroc with vehemence,

" the kneeling gods themselves should not move me to spare him, if my arm can inflict punishment!"

" He is proud, impetuous, and rash," said the youth, " but I believe him to be incapable of violence to a woman. I know not indeed with certainty that he is among the captors; or if he have actually taken part with them. If he have so debased himself, his own conscience will speedily punish him. Whether he have, or not, I cannot abandon him. Earl Sidroc,—your sword must leave him untouched."

" If he have laid the foul hand upon the captives," cried the Sea-king, " Never!"

" For the sake of two by whom he is beloved," continued Edmund, with a firm tone, " he *must* go free. He may have erred,—but he shall not fall undefended, even though my own sword be lifted upon his assailant. Earl Sidroc, you know my thoughts: let us not meet as enemies."

There was silence after he ceased; and the countenances of both were darkened.

" I make no promise," said Sidroc at length; " If he have done shame to my queen or daugh-

ter, there is but one course for me, were Surtur himself, and all the serpents of Nastrond, to oppose me. Let us hope, young Saxon, that the hands which have joined in friendship like ours may not have to wield the sword as enemies."

"We understand each other then," said the Saxon; "Get yourself now in readiness, for every moment may the summons be expected."

"For your enemy—your bitter calumniator, to feel thus"—said the Sea-king, as he placed the helmet upon his head,—"Saxon, I understand it not."

"He is not my enemy, again I say it," returned Edmund,—"and he is the only brother of the noblest of women. I will open my own breast to your sword, Earl Sidroc, more willingly than suffer it to fall upon him. But no more of this: where are your sword and shield? Hark! by heavens! feet are descending the steps."

"Those were too rich booty to be passed by," replied Sidroc, "They were taken from me while I lay stunned with that infernal battle-axe. I may find others when once at liberty."

"You must take the axe and shield of one of

our guards," whispered the youth: "Haste behind the door, while I replace the lamp. I hear them in discourse with my little friend. Speak not, nor move, till I cry out 'away!' I must have some talk with them, and endeavour to lure them in if possible, for we must avoid disturbance. But I must act as the occasion prompts. Whatever may chance, stir not you till I give the word; rush then out at the door, and leave the rest to me."

These directions had been given by Edmund in a whisper, while he moved cautiously with the lamp toward the place where it had stood at his entrance, and whence it could cast no ray upon the distant couch of Sidroc, for those just entering from the daylight to see that the prisoner was no longer there. He had scarcely set down the lamp when the door partly opened, and let in a flood of daylight, which, to Edmund's eyes, accustomed now to the darkness, showed with glaring distinctness every object in the vault. In the same instant the sound of voices without poured in; and, over all predominant, that of brother Elf, in angry contest with the soldiers.

These, however, by the laughter that mingled with their speech, appeared to be actuated by no very hostile feeling; and a few words soon suggested to Edmund the nature of the matter in dispute.

"And so you think," cried one of them, "that you shall pass in here with that big-bellied bottle under your arm, and leave us all dry-lipped? Pull to the door again, Alred. By the virgin! sir pale-face, we will be your tasters,—or you shall stay there, when you are once in, longer than you like."

Edmund hasted to the door, and drew it open.

"Why, how now, sirrah," said he to Elf, —who, with his arms clasping a stout leathern bottle, and with a look like that of a boy from whom some stouter urchin is threatening to take his apple or his pie-crust, stood in sturdy resistance to one of the guards who seemed disposed to relieve him of his burthen,—"Why, how now? what wrangling make you here? Give me the bottle instantly, and wait without there. You may quickly have a fresh supply; and these good fellows have a wearisome duty here, and

dry throats no doubt. Come in my lads; sit you down, and finish the bottle among you. I must have some talk with this foolish fellow without before I return to the prisoner. Leave an axe behind you, and I'll stand guard for you the while."

"Long live the valiant Sir Edmund!" cried they all; then without delay seized the tempting bait, and entered the vault. The door remained half open; and Edmund, having first despatched Elf to hold the horses in readiness, employed his eyes earnestly upon the fastenings without, that no delay might arise from ignorance of the manner in which it was to be secured. The soldiers, meantime, were groping their way toward a bench beside the table on which stood the lamp.

"This hole is as dark as hell" cried one of them. "Yes!" said another, "but I've that under my arm which will soon make it as bright as sunshine. And you, Sir Dane of the dark countenance,—you shall not want a drop to cheer you neither; for, as I take it, you can't have overheated yourself with dancing this morning.

—What? not a word for my civility? Then if you are too proud to say thank ye, you may e'en moisten your lips with your own spittle,—that's all I have to say. I force good liquor upon no man that doesn't like it."

"In the name of Zernebock," cried another, "is he asleep, or drunk, that he can't speak?"

"Asleep he may be," said the third, "for he has had night work enough to win him a day's hard snoring,—but for drunken,—unless he hath the trick to make his liquor out of darkness, or stone walls,—I know not how he should come by that luck. For my part——"

"Hold your prating tongue, there, Halcro," cried the first speaker, "and take the lamp to his nest. By the sword of St Peter! if he have made an end of it, some one hath saved a rope, and lost another thing that he would rather have kept,—and that's the stretcher. Carry the light steady, you rolling ale-vessel, or we shall be left in this pit, like toads under a tombstone;—and a dead man, mayhap, for all our company."

Sidroc, with some impatience watched the

progress of the guards towards his straw couch: and wondered what, at such a moment, could delay the promised summons of Edmund. The vault, as already noted, was of considerable extent; and the couch lay at its farther extremity. The figures of the men, partly illuminated where the rays fell upon them, and partly in dusk outline, shown upon the dimly lighted and humid atmosphere beyond them, were moving on slowly, and in a silence broken only by the low, sepulchral echoes of their feet: another instant, and they might discover the escape of their prisoner,—yet no signal had been given. The Sea-king stood ready to spring out; but, till the last moment, resolved to wait. In the same point of time, at length, he beheld the form of the Saxon darkening the entrance, and heard the exclamation of the guards which announced their discovery of his escape.

"Away,"—said Edmund, looking in; and Sidroc passed out like the swift shadow of a cloud.

The shout of the guards arose;—the lamp was extinguished, as they hastened forward;—

the door closed with a heavy jar;—the hollow echoes rumbled within;—the huge key was turned,—the bolts shot into the staple,—and the cries of the enraged soldiers again resounded.

Edmund flung aside the key; and placed in the hands of his companion the long axe, and the leathern shield. "Speak no word," said he: "You may pass as a guard in attendance upon me. If opposed, we will leap the walls. Follow close behind, and do as you see me do."

With long and rapid strides, they moved on. The eastern gate stood open; but the sentinels were at their post.

"The good morrow to you, my friends," said Edmund, as he passed through; "I ride out in haste."

"God speed you, Sir Edmund;" was the reply; and the two friends descended.

"What takes the knight out in such a hurry?" said one of the sentinels.

"I know not," replied another; "but what huge-limbed fellow has he with him? Does any here know the man? There is not the like of him in the garrison, I'm sure; and the knight

brought no follower with him,—that *I* can vouch for,—for I opened the gate to him myself."

"The fellow gloomed like a thunder-cloud as he passed," said a third; "I know not who he may be, but the face of him has met my eyes before now."

"May I burn in hell fire if it is not the dark Northman!" exclaimed another speaker. "Run to the dungeon, Guthloc, and see if all's fair. Away man, away! He set him loose last night, —and, my helmet to a rush cap, he has him again out of the trap! Take bow and shaft in hand my lads; and let's after them like greyhounds, if Guthloc bring bad tidings."

"And if he have done such a scurvy trick," cried another, "the greater fool he! He may whistle after his knighthood, if that be his game."

A loud cry of "Off! off!" from Guthloc, who now appeared, waving his arm, and running with all his speed toward them, was the signal for pursuit.

"Blow the alarm trumpet, Guthloc, and stand to the gate," cried one of the sentinels;

and they instantly shot down the steep path. "Treason! Treason! Stop the horsemen!" was now their shout. "Stop the knight in the steel armour, and the fellow with the long axe! Treason! Treason!"

At the same moment the alarm trumpet sounded above, and was quickly answered by shouts from the camp. The two tall warriors, and the diminutive Elf, were springing to the saddle as the sentinels came in sight. Six bows were instantly bent; and as many arrows whizzed through the air. But the horses were away at full speed,—no shaft struck its mark;—and, before the bows could be bent for a second discharge, the riders were out of reach.

The trumpet still continued its shrill alarum from the walls; and the shouts arose louder: but the riders pressed onward at full stretch of their steeds. Edmund cast one backward glance at the castle. The sun shone bright; and he saw distinctly the tall figure of Earl Oddune, standing within the gate, and, as his gestures showed, vehemently urging to pursuit. The steeds thundered through the camp, of which

most of the tents were yet standing: the plunderers stared at them as they glanced by.

"The Northmen! the Northmen!" shouted Edmund, pointing onward; and the alarmed soldiers, repeating the cry, began to fly toward the castle.

"You play a subtle game, Sir Edmund," said Sidroc, who rode close beside: "This feint will carry every man to the walls; and drive back those who are issuing out. We shall have soon a free course; and, if our horses can hold on thus, may soon overtake the brutal ravishers. The gods grant that your young friend may have had small share in the black deed!"

"Speak not of that, Earl Sidroc," returned Edmund; "you know how we stand on that point. The madness of a young, hot blood may be atoned for at a price less than life. The execrations of my countrymen follow me for that which I am doing in your behalf: I cannot hear these things unmoved. I have stained my honour in the eyes of those whose commendation is the most dear to me: I have stooped to all but crime: I have sacrificed much—very much

for you, and I claim something from you in return."

"All the gods grant," replied the Sea-king, "that you may not need it! I would give a limb rather than meet this youth as an enemy: but, if he have wronged my queen or daughter, ——Saxon, my heart will burst if I avenge not the deed! All villainy else that he could perpetrate would I forgive, for your sake,——but this—thunder of hell! my blood is like molten iron in my veins when I think of this."

"Think then no more of it," replied Edmund; "leave to the hour its own evil. We may be foiled in our pursuit; or the thing which you dread may have never chanced. One object of vengeance at the least you will have; but he seems not a man lightly to be encountered by one ill armed as yourself."

"By the spear of Odin!" cried Sidroc, "I "would rush upon that villain, were he armed in the scales of the great serpent, and my only weapon these bare hands. 'Twas his felon arm that brought me last night to the earth:—Let him now look to himself. The stroke of the

thunderbolt could not more amaze him than shall this axe upon his crest, if the gods will but place him before me! My brain yet rocks and rings with the jar of his accursed weapon. Coward! He stood me not face to face, though backed by numbers,—but treacherously stole on me behind. Let him look to himself when next we meet!"

"I see no sign of pursuit," said Edmund, after looking back over a long line of waste and open ground,—"and we must now soon I believe change our course. It will be well to somewhat slack pace also, or our horses will not long serve us."

As he said this, they reached a less frequented road that turned more southward. After some examination of the surrounding objects, Edmund felt a confidence that it was the same to which he had been directed by the soldier; and at a slower, though still a rapid pace, advanced upon it.

CHAPTER V.

The two warriors now rode some way in silence, each occupied by his own reflections and feelings, which, as may be supposed, were with neither of them of the most agreeable kind. The heart of the Sea-king burned at the thought of his queen and daughter, at that moment perhaps vainly calling on him for help. He thought on the battle, where so many hundreds of his countrymen had perished: on his own capture, and ignoble bonds: and the strong handle of the war-axe quivered in his iron gripe as in fancy he beheld before him the brutal Saxon who had wronged him. Ever and anon, his fiery eye glanced forward upon the road, impatient to descry the object of his vengeance.

The thoughts of Edmund had a more melancholy cast. He saw his new-earned glories dimmed by the act in which he was now engaged for

the sake of a noble, but fierce and vindictive Northman; and he sometimes doubted whether his impulses had not blinded his better reason. He had, at the peril of his life, earned honours which now, with peril, he was flinging away. He had heard the acclamations which hailed him as the champion of his country changed into execrations against a traitor. How were the tongues of men now busied with his fame?—How would his deeds be reported to the king?—How would the proud and headlong Sigifred paint him to the eyes of Elfrida?—Yet again he thought upon the beautiful and dignified queen whom he had rescued from the ruffian Beornwulph, and whom he was still called upon to protect:—upon the majestic Sidroc, to whom he had owed life, and with whom he had formed a compact that had been dishonourably broken. "Was he not foully wronged," said he to himself:—"Was he not in base and undeserved bonds?—Was he not threatened with a felon's death?—And could I, without infamy, have abandoned him? No! Let them brand me as a traitor!—I am still willing to lay down life for my country. Let the proud Sigifred paint me to the eye of Elfrida blacker

than hell!—he hath yet to learn by what hand he himself was rescued from torment and death. —Let the ignorant or the malicious poison the ear of the king against me!—I will lay my whole heart before him, and he will judge me aright. But the eyes of all men shall yet see whether I am leagued with the foes of my country. Let me but aid the cause of this one noble enemy,—let me behold him, with his queen and daughter, once in safety,—and then shall it be seen whose foot is foremost in the battle."

The affair in which he was engaged at the time when brother Elf had presented himself, had rendered it impossible for Edmund to make any enquiry of the little man as to the cause of his unlooked-for appearance there; and the absorbing nature of his reflections since their escape had almost banished the poor brother from his thoughts. He was, nevertheless, conscious of his presence, by the sounds of his horse-hoofs close behind; and was occasionally reminded of him in a more pointed way by the pale countenance, and quick little enquiring eye, of Elf himself, as for a moment he brought his horse along-

side that of the youth, and then, after an earnest look upon him, again dropped behind. He was seen with the bodily organ, though the mind took little cognizance of him. At length, however, the train of Edmund's thoughts brought back the circumstances of the escape from the dungeon; and with them, of course, the person who had been aidant in it. He felt immediately that he had been guilty of some neglect, if not disrespect, to the harmless little monk, in leaving him so long unnoticed,—and he instantly checked his horse to suffer Elf to come abreast of him. The face of the latter, as Edmund began to address him, gleamed out in a way that might have been compared to the effect of a burst of moonlight upon the statue of a monkey.

"My good brother," said the youth, "pardon me, I pray you, that I have so long ——"

"Take no thought of that, sir knight," cried the monk,—"you have doubtless had other matters to think over;—but tell me now, how like you the steeds that I have provided for us?"

"Truly they are noble beasts, my good friend. But now I bethink me, a marvellous quick bar-

gain must you have made,—and have doubtless suffered the usual luck of those who buy in haste; —nevertheless I grudge not the extortioner's mulct, since the emergency was pressing, and the steeds are likely to do us good service."

"You will find it little the lighter," said Elf, with an arch smile, handing to him at the same time the richly embroidered purse, apparently undiminished in weight.

"Why how is this?" said the surprised youth.

"Ha-ha," replied the little monk, laughing, and giving a knowing shake of the head,—"You did not think that horse-flesh was like to be so cheap. When you tell over your pieces, sir knight, you will find that they have been too good friends to part company at such short notice."

"I await your explanation, my good brother," said Edmund with a serious look.

"Why the matter is just this," replied Elf: "I have made too many bargains for the priory, in fish, flesh, and such other odd articles, to go with a purse full of gold, to buy three good horses in half a minute. Christ save us, sir knight! why the knaves would have been content with

nothing short of an Earl's ransom for such cattle, being wanted, as it were, on a matter of life and death. And how was I, think you, to keep the grim fellows from mistrusting me, and laying hands, mayhap, on purse and person too? No, sir knight, I went other gates to work; and wisely and fairly too."

"I know not to what you are tending, my good brother," said Edmund; "but I trust all *was* done fairly."

"Fairly, and honourably, and justly," returned the monk. "All your brave deeds last night were not done in the dark, Sir Edmund,—or, at least, they were not done in a corner,—for dark enough it was, except for a twinkle of moonlight, and a wood fire or so,—but, however,—people did not hold their tongues about that taking of the wizzard's flag, and killing the giant, and all the rest; and surely, when so much good spoil was taken from the enemy, you, who had most hand in it, had a right to some portion."

"Then these horses were put apart as my share of the booty, I suppose," said the youth.

"Why, yes—in a manner, no doubt," replied the brother; "but you shall hear."

"I required no such thing," said the youth, "nevertheless I do not now regret to have accepted them."

"Of a surety not," returned the monk; "and I dare say, if Earl Oddune had portioned your share out for you, it would have been three times better worth. Nevertheless I myself, sir knight, was your chooser; and if I have done you less than justice, lay the fault to want of time and opportunity."

"You could not have better served me," replied Edmund,—"These steeds are worth more to me now than the jewels in a monarch's crown. It was not, however, my wish that you should share the peril of my escape, my good brother,—since, you may remember, I charged you with the purchase of but two horses; which methought, at a time when so many must have been the prize of needy soldiers, you would have had small difficulty to purchase; and that quickly. Indeed, to speak truth, your bearing on horseback when I last saw, or rather *felt* you mounted, was not

such as to make me suppose you fitted for a chase like that which I had in view. But, believe me, my good brother, you keep the saddle better than many a man who holds himself horseman enough to follow the deer-pack."

"Now good Sir Edmund," said the brother in a supplicating tone, and laying his right hand gently on the arm of Edmund,—"don't speak again about that day's misfortune. If I sat not steadily on the grey steed, bethink you that I had been sorely overtaken, and withal used like a beast, and worse,—so that——but don't let us talk any more about it: and, for the love of Christ Sir Edmund, never do you cast that matter into my teeth again."

"Enough, enough," said the youth; "And yet, my good friend, I must some time have farther discourse with you. A grievous thing is this flight of yours from the cloister, and the kind brethren; and I know not how it may be answered to them."

"Well then, for some other time leave it," said the little monk: "But, for the matter of horsemanship,—Lord bless you, Sir Edmund!

why I could ride a will-o-the-wisp, if so be I could but get astride of him. I learned first to ride upon pigs;—whew? I remember it as if it were but yesterday. I was but an urchin then,—not the height of a five year's old child,—though may be in my fourteenth winter, or there away. My poor father,—God rest his soul! he is dead long since,—life, Sir Edmund, flies like to a weaver's shuttle, as he used to say to me;—my poor father,—his name was Coifi—had sent me—being then, as I said, an urchin, and somewhat unsteady for a serious trade,—to an acquaintance of his, a reputable man, and a rich enough, that I might learn of him the craft of the swine-herd: and, that I might be well grounded in all knowledge necessary thereto, my master,—his name was Grub,—and a queer man he was,—I can see him as if he were standing now before me, with his two odd eyes, one larger than the other,—and his big nose all of one side,—and his mouth shaped like that of the fish called a bull-head,—well—my master Grub, I say, appointed to me the watching of his herd by day; and the task seemed pleasant unto me, since the

place was lonely, and had plenteous room for the bodily exercise in which I alway delighted."

"So I have understood," said Edmund—"But cast your eyes along the road, to the right of the small pointed hill, with the tower upon it: methinks I see the twinkling of armour there at times, and figures in motion."

"I see something too," answered the monk, "But it is may be the sunshine on a pool of water,—or the glistering of the smooth holly leaves,—or what not: no man's eye can tell. But howsoever, sir knight, as I was saying, I took great delight in all bodily motion, and truly could scarce lie still, day or night,—and that puts me in mind of a queer story that I'll tell you some day, about climbing on the top of the house in my sleep, and sliding down the chimney all covered with soot as black as Belzebub, as my poor mother used to say—for it was the summer time, and my parents had with them divers of their neighbours, counselling together how they should dispose of their son Elf,—and very gravely were they talking together,—and the night was just setting in—so that when I rolled among them,

and then awoke with the fall, and afterwards started up and screamed hideously,—for in truth I was myself amazed and frighted,—sorely were they afeard, and ran from before me ;—but, however, I wont tell you that tale now,—inasmuch I was talking about the swine, and how I first learned to ride. Well,—taking delight, as I said, in all bodily motion, marvellous pleasant was it to me for a while to hold in chase the grunting herd, whom I pursued with shout and halloo from sunrise till sunset, grievously to the vexation of my master Grub, when it afterwards came to his ears : and this I had done daily for one se'nnight before I discovered a new pastime ; and I'll tell you how that came about."

" I believe," said Edmund, " that I must soon ride forward to the Earl Sidroc : the figures before us are certainly men, and in armour. And yet I would not chafe him by a false alarm. We gain ground rapidly upon them, and shall quickly put the matter out of doubt."

" Well then, I'll make a short story of it," said Elf,—" But the men will do us no harm, I dare say. It was one Sabbath, after I had been

to mass—I and another lad—his name was Stuf,—took the Sabbath mornings by turns:—that had been my morning, and I was to take charge of the swine for the rest of the day. Well,—it was a hot summer's day at noon, and the sun shone like a fire;—and the swine, that had been having a quiet time of it with Stuf, who was a slow, big-headed lad, were all stretched in the sunshine, and sleeping like dormice. Ha-ha, says I to myself, you shall see a new world soon my merry men: let Stuf get once out of eyeshot, and we'll have a pretty time of it this fine summer's day. Well,—I stood, and watched till the lad was fairly out of sight; and then steals I to one lazy fat black fellow that lay swelling his sides, and every now and then flapping his huge ear at the flies, and little dreaming of what was coming. Ho-ho! says I to myself, you shake your ear, do you?—I'll give you something to shake it for. So softly creeps I,—and gets one leg over him,—though it was all I could do to bestride his fat carcase,—for I was alway short in the leg,—and then down I stoops, and puts my mouth close to his ear—and halloos as loud

as a huntsman after hounds. Ho-ho—by the mass 'twas rare sport that followed! Up starteth the pig,—like a sinful man may be at the sound of the great trumpet—up starteth he, with a roar —up goeth I with him,—for he was on his legs before I had a thought of getting fairly upon mine;—up starteth at the same moment the whole herd, with a snorting, and a grunting, and a rampaging, that the like was never seen. Out crieth I,—and out roareth the black pig,—and away he gallopeth, as if the devil had gotten into him. Down goeth my head then upon his shoulder,—and in sticketh my heels into his flanks,—and fast by his bristles holdeth I with both hands,—and away fly we,—and away fly the whole herd, down and up—and this way, and that, tearing and roaring—till at last rumble tumble comes the black pig and I to the ground together,—and over we rolls—for it was a steep bit of ground just there,—and over again, and over,—and never stops, for a matter of four yards or so, till souse we goes both together into a kind of toad pond, almost smothered in the black

mud, that stunk—fah !—worse than a fou-mart."

" You must have had enough of pig-back, I think," said Edmund, with a smile.

" Never a bit," cried Elf, " I had found out a new trick ; and I promise you I made good use of my time for the next se'nnight; till there was not a swine that did not sweat once a-day like a dung-heap on a frosty morning. And that's the way, Sir Edmund, that I learned to ride ;—and, after that time, never was there thing with four legs, that I could get astride on, that didn't feel the weight of my four quarters, when once I could lay hands on him. Howsoever,—once on a time, as I was kicking it away at the ribs of a red cow,—but I wont tell you that now; for I have not done my story about these horses, and that's more to the present purpose."

But at that moment the eyes of Edmund encountered an object which drew him from the side of the little brother, and prevented his learning that Elf had, in plain words, stolen the horses, which were the property of Earl Oddune, and not part of the spoil. In doing this

act, however, the good brother had opined that he took nothing more than was fairly the due of Edmund, in consideration of the conspicuous part which he had played in the battle, and the apparent certainty that, otherwise, no spoil at all would be allotted to him. It must, also, be mentioned that the horses stood among others which had been pointed out to him as among the fruits of the victory; and that he had therefore no consciousness of doing any thing but what was at once politic and laudable. He had soon afterwards reasons for thinking that the high-minded youth might view the transaction in a less favourable light; and he, accordingly, suppressed the narration of it; nor was it till some time later that the truth came to the knowledge of Edmund, in whom, as may be supposed, it awakened surprise and displeasure.

Elf, however, was now proceeding with great self-complacency to relate it, when, at a sudden turning of the road, the object which had before attracted the notice of Edmund became again visible, and at so small a distance as to remove all doubt that he beheld the party of

Beornwulph, with their two captives. "Stir not from this spot,"—he said to the brother, who stared with astonishment at his emotion, and the sudden kindling of his eye,—"Take no part in aught that you may see, but if any man advances upon you, ply the spur, and away."

CHAPTER VI.

Elf could make no reply: he turned deadly pale,—checked his horse,—and sat, with wide eye and open mouth, looking after the youth, who, in the next moment, was at the side of Earl Sidroc.

The Sea-king appeared unconscious of his presence. His dilated eyes were fixed upon the groupe before him,—his nostrils were distended,—his teeth were close set.

"I may have no need to mingle in this fray," said the Saxon, "let us exchange shields."

He proffered the buckler of Amleth, while he spoke, but Sidroc made no reply; and seemed not to hear him.

"If the dark-haired noble be among them," continued Edmund, "remember, Earl Sidroc, that which we have spoken together; and leave him to me."

Still the Sea-king replied not; but moved on with the same fixed eye of fire, and look of terrible fierceness. Again Edmund proffered the shield of proof,—but still the warrior sat silent and moveless, like a statue of iron. He quickened not his pace,—he looked neither to the right hand nor the left,—he seemed not to breathe, or think: one intensest feeling appeared to be all that he had of life.

Edmund had now no difficulty to see that the horseman on the right hand of Windreda was Sigifred,—and that he to the left of Aslauga was the huge Beornwulph. Behind these rode four men abreast; but they were not in mail, and their appearance was that of foot soldiers mounted for the occasion. Edmund could not doubt that such a party must speedily be routed by a warrior like Sidroc, with slight aid from his own arm; but he was anxious to take no part in the combat, more than would be necessary to prevent Sigifred from coming into contact with the Northman. The arrangement of the party was favourable to his views; and he moved on beside the Sea-king, not doubting that he would first

concern himself with the chief aggressor, Beornwulph, and thus give time for Edmund to interfere betwixt him and Sigifred.

They had now attained within some few yards of the party, and their approach was still unheard. The females were evidently weeping: and sat, with head depressed, and relaxed limbs, as if bowed down with grief. But the demeanour of the two horsemen who held their bridles was not alike. The head of Sigifred was slightly bent forward, as he looked upon the face of Windreda, whom, by the tone of his voice, he appeared to be soothing: while the stern erect figure of Beornwulph had the air of a surly jailor carrying off his prisoner. The voice of Sigifred was soft and kind, though it had rather the tone of a man of gallantry, striving to insinuate himself into the good graces of a pretty woman, than that of one who endeavours to administer consolation to the unfortunate: while the few words which escaped Beornwulph, as the pursuers came up to the hindmost riders, were in a tone of brutal authority.

Edmund cast one glance at the face of Sidroc

as he passed the soldiers, and saw upon his lip a grim smile of portentous meaning, and his eyeballs lightening as if with actual fire, while his rigid right arm, bearing the gleaming axe, looked like a bended bar of thick iron. In the next moment the Sea-king was at the side of Beornwulph, still in silence, but looking into his face with an expression that made the surly Saxon recoil as if he had beheld some horrid apparition. Neither of them spoke. The soldiers, who rode a few yards behind, gazed with astonishment; then looked each at the other but said not a word, and knew not how to act. Edmund, looking by turns upon all, rode close behind Sigifred, who gave no sign that he was aware of the presence of strangers. The two females, whose heads were bowed, saw as yet nothing; but Aslauga noticed that the hand of Beornwulph had suddenly dropped her rein. The cavalcade moved on still a little way in silence, broken only by the low voice of Sigifred: and still the eye of Sidroc was fixed upon Beornwulph, who appeared spell-bound, or like a bird under the fascinating gaze of a serpent. The

colour had fled from his face, his jaw had dropped, and his eyes protruded as if they would have leapt from their sockets. Twice he attempted to speak,—but his tongue failed him, and his limbs felt like those of a man struggling under the nightmare. He knew not who it was that rode beside him; but the countenance of the great fiend himself could not more have daunted him. He could not take his eyes from the face of the dreadful stranger to look behind to his followers,—he could not call upon them for help. At length his trembling arm began slowly to move towards his battle axe, which hung at the saddle bow,—and the weapon of Sidroc was instantly conveyed to his left hand. The Saxon was yet groping for the handle of his axe, which, in his terror, he could not find —when Sidroc extended his right arm, seized the sword-belt of his enemy, and with a strength that passion had rendered superhuman, almost lifted him from the saddle,—then flung him with violence to the ground.

All was instant confusion. The females shrieked, with mingled fear and joy, as they turned

their eyes upon the terrific Sea-king; the soldiers cried out, and drew their swords,—Sigifred started, and looked aghast,—but his right hand was in the iron grasp of Edmund, whose voice, in the same moment, warned the soldiers.

"Forbear!" he cried, "and you shall be untouched. If you advance—at your own peril be it! Sir Sigifred," he then proceeded in a lower tone, "I am your friend: if you would save your life, and perhaps mine also,—away. Pledge me your honour to this, and I will let go your hand."

"Villain!" cried Sigifred, vainly struggling to free himself, "I will die before I abandon my friend!"

While this passed between them, loud cries were heard from Beornwulph, over whom, ere he could rise from the ground, the vindictive Northman guided the feet of his charger, as though he deemed such wretch unworthy to die by a warrior's arm. He spoke meantime not a word,—but, with his menacing eye, and uplifted axe, deterred the fear-stricken soldiers from advancing upon him.

"Spare life, Earl Sidroc,"—cried Edmund: "Spare him!" exclaimed Aslauga, "he hath done us no wrong to merit death."

But Beornwulph now arose, and apparently unhurt, except that his left arm hung useless, as if broken by the trampling of the horse. Terror had given way to fury, and he flew with drawn sword, against the Sea-king, calling at the same time upon his followers to aid him. The men pushed forward,—but too late. Beornwulph struck one back-handed blow, which fell flat upon the right side of his enemy, and then attempted to escape from the advancing steed.

"Ha! dog!" said Sidroc,—speaking, for the first time, through his closed teeth,—and, in the same moment, discharged upon the helmet of his enemy a blow fatal as the thunder-bolt.

The advancing soldiers beheld the instant death; and, wheeling round their horses, fled backward at their utmost speed. All had been the work of but a few seconds. Edmund saw the death-blow, and instantly released the hand of Sigifred.

"If you would not have more blood spilt," he

said, " away ! and speak not a word." Sigifred darted at him a look of hatred, clapped spurs to his horse, and flew after the soldiers.

Sidroc beheld the flight of the young noble, but made no attempt to stop it. Vengeance appeared satisfied; and his look had lost its fierceness.

" Let him go !" he said with a calm voice, alighting at the same time from his steed; " For your sake, Sir Edmund,—and because of the words which fell from him, he shall pass untouched."

He stooped, as he ended, and began to take his own good sword and belt from the slain spoiler.

At this moment brother Elf, with a face expressive of great alarm, and uttering inarticulate cries, rode hastily up. He cast a look of horror upon the bleeding body; and then, in a faltering voice, addressed Edmund. " I fear—I fear,—there are horsemen riding furiously this way,—I saw them afar off,—and fled to bring the tidings."

"We are pursued, Earl Sidroc," said Edmund.

"Away then!" cried the Sea-king, snatching up his roomy shield, which had been dropped in the hurry of flight by the armour-bearer of Beornwulph,—"Away like the wind!"

He leaped into the saddle as he ended, and rode at full speed after the queen and her daughter, whose horses, alarmed at the sudden fray, had borne them to a short distance from them. Edmund followed with Elf, and they were quickly at the side of the alarmed females, who now, at the word of Sidroc, put their horses to full speed.

"We must turn westward from the road," said the Sea-king; "If we can gain the forest yonder, we may escape them. Not willingly with such a charge, would I encounter peril that may be avoided. But, were you and I alone, Sir Edmund, and it were your pleasure to stand by me for the worst, the villains should not have to boast that Earl Sidroc had fled before them."

"They are descending the brow of the hill,"

said Edmund, looking backward,—" but we have yet good distance,—and if our horses hold out,—"

" There seems not to be a score of men," cried the Sea-king,—" and I would fain try the field with them :—but we must not tarry. Take the bridle of Windreda, Sir Edmund; and leap the ditch. We will baffle the scent amid yonder covers."

He took himself the rein of Aslauga,—all dashed together from the road, and went on at great speed over the hollow-sounding turf of a wide waste land, thinly covered with stunted oaks, and bushes of thorn.

" I fear they have seen us," cried Edmund, " but we shall quickly find better hiding."

A faint halloo of distant voices seemed to confirm the supposition of the youth; but the steeds flew on at a full gallop; and when, on plunging into a thick wilderness of wood, he looked back, their pursuers were no longer visible. Directing their course westward, as well as they could guess by the rays of the sun, they held on at as much speed as the nature of the ground permit-

ted; and, after a ride of some hours, gained a prospect of the ocean, and the Danish ships at the distance of apparently but a few miles. But their horses were now covered with foam, and grievously fatigued, so that even yet it appeared doubtful if they should reach the shore: while, to their surprise and vexation, as they again entered upon a travelled road, they beheld their pursuers, advancing upon the same way, and apparently at greater speed than their own jaded animals could accomplish.

That the Sea-king would endeavour to shape his course in the direction of the fleet, was a supposition too obvious to be overlooked; and their better knowledge of the country had enabled the pursuers, by an easier, though somewhat more circuitous road, to gain a considerable distance upon them. But *their* horses, also, were exhausted; and they soon found that they made but little advance upon the fliers. Like panting stag and jaded hound, the chase held on; and the pursuers were still some half score of spear casts behind when the fliers came upon a gently descending ground, at the foot of which,

and scarcely a mile distant, were seen the masts of the ships.

" We may laugh at them now, methinks, Sir Edmund," cried Sidroc with exultation: " And, if they look not the better about them, they may themselves have to go first in a chase. I see men on yonder shore whose feet will be fleeter far than those of their jaded steeds."

He was yet speaking when his own horse, which had begun to stumble at every slight ruggedness of the road, came with a heavy fall to the ground, and remained incapable of rising.

" Poor brute !" cried he, " Thou hast borne me bravely ! would that I could show thee more gratitude than by leaving thee in thy distress ! But fare thee well."

He released himself from the stirrup, while he spoke this; and was instantly at the side of the queen, intending to pursue his way on foot. But Edmund had dismounted; and now proffered his horse.—" Away Earl Sidroc," he cried, " I shall dash into the wood and be safe. Farewell !"

" To the saddle again, Sir Edmund !" ex-

claimed the Sea-king—"You will be pursued. May the curse of my fathers be on me if I leave you! We shall reach friends anon."

Edmund read the determination of the Northman, and again put foot in the stirrup. But the distress of the good horse, after this pause of a few seconds only, was so evident that he could not endure to exact more from him. "On then!" he cried; "I may at least aid your defence, should they overtake us."

He sprang forward while he spoke, and quickly gained the side of Windreda. "No, no, my good brother," he said to the monk, who was preparing to alight, "our feet are swifter than yours: for your life make no stop!"

"If it were not that I have fasted since the morn," replied Elf, "truly I would run by your side for the space of three good hours, and not blow a bit the more. I have known a little dog weary out a stout steed before now: and once I remember, when I was not the height of this horse's belly, to have run from the town of Taunton even to Bridgewater after a swift horseman returning from the market who lured me

on by holding before mine eyes savoury cakes, that he might behold, as he said, how long the whirligig thing could spin. But now am I faint, and grievously hungered."

"By the thunder of Heaven! they gain ground upon us now!" exclaimed the Sea-king, looking back: "and your friend of the dark locks, Sir Edmund, rides foremost."

He seized the bridle of the queen as he ended, and strove to quicken the pace of the wearied animal.

"We are seen from the shore," cried Edmund, "and men are advancing towards us. Ride back my good brother,—no man will harm you,—ride back,—and say to Sir Sigifred that, if they continue the pursuit, they will fall into the hands of enemies."

But Elf bethought him of the matter of the purloined steeds, and had no inclination to be called upon for explanation.

"Truly Sir Edmund," he replied; "these are men of fierce bearing; and will have small respect for a humble servant of God like me, who have moreover———"

" Then I will myself meet them," said the youth. " I cannot see them rushing upon destruction. Farewell Earl Sidroc—farewell gentle queen, and farewell——"

" On—on !"—cried the Sea-king, with startling energy,—" They will put you instantly to death—On ! I swear to you by my sword-blade they shall return untouched if you will proceed with us !"

" Oh ! leave us not, generous youth !" cried Aslauga, " Do not make us curse ourselves as the cause of your death !"

Windreda turned her pale face upon him, and appeared as if she also would have conjured him to go on : but her voice failed her.

Edmund was again at her side ; and they continued their course.

But the thoughts of the young hero were painfully agitated. He had witnessed, if he had not aided in, the death of a Saxon by the hand of an enemy,—and the execrations of his enraged countrymen, who were every moment drawing nigher, rang dreadfully in his ear. He was approaching, as a friend, the savage invaders of his native land :

he knew not what might be his fate should he go among these men, lawless, and reckless of all ties that bound the Christian: he could not be assured of the power that the Sea-king might have to control them, according to his promise, should the pursuers fall into their hands: he hoped that the advancing Danes might have been seen; and that his countrymen would retire before the danger came upon them: but of this he could not be sure: it had been the glance of but a moment that had shewn them to him, and they were now hidden from sight in the windings of the steep banked roads. Such were the feelings,—the doubts, and the fears, that perplexed him. At one moment he resolved to turn back, and surrender himself to his pursuers. He would appeal to the king, and free his name from dishonour; he would die in the cause of his country. In the next, he feared that, in the madness of their revenge, they might instantly slay him, and that eternal infamy would cover his memory. He heard opprobrious epithets thundered against him, yet he knew that he deserved them not, and his anxious wish was for

the safety of those who were cursing him. He beheld them at hand,—he called out to warn them of their danger; "Back! back!" he cried,—"The Northmen are advancing!—they will quickly be upon you! Back for your lives!"

Shouts of derision answered him. He saw that they believed him not.

"Then I will risk your vengeance to save you!" he said to himself;—"You will believe my warning, when I surrender my life into your hands. The Sea-king must soon have aid, and can no longer need mine!"

He dropped the bridle of Windreda as he finally resolved upon this step; and was turning to meet his pursuers, when he beheld the delicate form of the rider sinking strengthless from the horse. He caught her before she reached the ground; and saw that she had swooned.

To prosecute his new-formed design would now have been to abandon the whole party to their enemies; since the Sea-king would never have quitted the beloved daughter of his queen, and the mother would not have left her child; while the unavoidable delay would have brought

the pursuers upon them. Sidroc saw what had chanced, and hastened to take his burthen from the arms of the youth.

"No, no!" cried Edmund, "leave her to me; she is light as a dove in my arms. Your sword may be wanted for the defence of all,—but I cannot use mine against my countrymen."

"Then by the deeps of Nastrond!" exclaimed Sidroc, "you will perish! for here the dogs are upon us!"

His voice was scarcely audible amid the shouts of the Saxons who, spurring their horses to their utmost speed, as they beheld the fall of Windreda, and hoping that the prey would now fall instantly into their clutches, rushed onward, overtook, and surrounded the fugitives. Several of the horses stumbled when suddenly checked; and two or three of the riders were hurled to the ground. Not one had time to alight before Edmund called with a loud voice, "Touch not these, and I give myself into your hands!"

"Traitor!" cried Sigifred, "thou art already our captive!"

"Down with the dark Northman!" vociferat-

ed a dozen voices at once, as the men leaped from their horses.

"Down with the traitor Saxon!" cried others.

"The Northmen will be instantly upon you, my countrymen!" exclaimed Edmund;—"Turn for your lives, or ye will perish."

"Perish thou first, presumptuous traitor!" cried Sigifred, advancing with his sword upon the youth.

Edmund had laid his burthen upon the ground, at the first sight of weapons,—and readily parried the blow of Sigifred, but struck not in turn.

"I surrender," he again shouted, "so these may go free. Strike not him who yields!"

"By the God of heaven!" cried one, "that black fiend seems resolved to carve out their freedom himself with his sword. Behind him, my men,—take him behind."

The speaker rushed on as he said this; but fell dead at one sweep of the sword of Sidroc, who had already laid three others upon the ground. Several strokes were aimed at Edmund, which he with difficulty escaped; yet still he offered no blow in exchange; but called upon his

enemies to forbear, and save themselves from the approaching Northmen. Shouts of derision replied to him; and it appeared too evident that they were resolved to have his life. His fiery temper could not longer be controlled. A heavy blow upon the back aroused him; and he blazed suddenly out upon them, with a fury that might be compared to the bursting of a bombshell. His assailants recoiled from him; and the soldier who had struck him, fell instantly under his sword. Another was dashed backward by a thrust of his shield, and the deadly steel was again uplifted, when the cry of the advancing Northmen was heard, and the scene changed in a moment.

Edmund dropped his weapon, and flew to the side of the Sea-king.

"Remember your promise!" he said, "and let them go free!"

"Go not you with them," replied Sidroc, "and they are safe."

"Agreed! agreed!" cried the youth, "Onward! and stop the advance!"

Sidroc started forward, and held up his arm———

"Not a step farther!" he shouted to the Northmen, who, with gleaming swords, were flying to the fray, "Back! back! Sidroc has pledged himself for the safety of these men."

A shout of joy hailed the Sea-king; and every foot suddenly stood still.

Meantime, among the Saxons were seen consternation, and flight, and confusion. Steeds were mounted in haste, shields were dropped, and swords flung aside in the hurry to secure the means of escape. The wounded called on their companions for aid, but they that could fly tarried not to give it. Edmund strove continually to calm their terror; and assured them that they would be untouched. He assisted several of the wounded to mount their horses; yet bade them wait that their hurts might be bound up. But no man inclined to trust the faith of Northmen; and, in a brief time, all, save those who had run their last course, were hurrying in terror along the road.

Edmund had desired to speak with Sigifred a few words; but that active youth was among the first to mount; and the wish was consequently

disappointed. He watched the retreat of the last man, and then turned to Sidroc, who was supporting Windreda, as she began to recover from her swoon. The queen was also beside her, pale and trembling. She had scarcely strength to express to Edmund her gratitude for his powerful aid; and Windreda could speak to him with looks only. The thanks of Sidroc were breathed with deep and solemn earnestness.

"You have taught me," he concluded, "to know in man a nobleness of nature of which I had thought him incapable. You have sacrificed for me and mine much that men hold dearest. The religion that so elevates the soul must surely be from a higher God than him who delights but in desolation and slaughter. But of this I speak not now. Sir Edmund,—I owe to you the services of all my life to come. Your countrymen are incensed against you,—justice may be denied you,—will you go with me to my own land, and dwell with me for ever as my brother, or my son?"

He pressed the hand of Edmund in his, as he spoke this, and looked in his face with an expres-

sion of the highest esteem and the most devoted attachment.

"That which I have done or suffered for you, Earl Sidroc," replied the youth, "is but the discharge of a debt which for many years I have owed to you. Our fates will now divide us. Whether I live or die, in my own country must my lot be cast. I shall hasten to the king, and abide my doom. Let us then part, and each to the other——"

"Part?" cried the Sea-king,—"Here?—The sun descending,—and your incensed enemies at hand? Now by the sky above us, and the throned Gods! Sir Edmund, this were no courteous deed! Pass, at least, this night with me; and we will take counsel for the future; and your acts shall then be free as the air. Let me not think that you hold in mistrust the good faith of him for whom you have done so much. By my horse-shoulder! you shall *not* go from me till the new day's sun is in the heaven! You are wearied and hungry, and——Say to me, 'Sidroc, I will abide this one night with thee'——Say but that, and I ask of thee now no more."

" It may not be," answered Edmund: " I mistrust you not, Earl Sidroc; but never can I willingly mingle with the enemies of my country. For my safety, have no fear. Our pursuers, be sure, will not linger upon the road: and I shall somewhere find shelter for the night. My course on the morrow will be toward the king. He will hear, and rightly judge, that which I have done; and my enemies will have no power against me. Farewell then, noble Sidroc!—and if that which one Saxon youth hath done for you appear worthy in your eyes, then remember it when the tongues of your fierce warriors would stir you against his country. Queen of the golden locks, farewell! Farewell, gentle Windreda! May the blessing of the One God be ever with you!"

He kissed their hands as he spoke, and received in return their reluctant, yet cordial adieus. Sidroc remained awhile silent, and with a downcast brow: took then in his iron grasp the extended hand of the Saxon, and pressed it with a force that, to one of weaker nerve, might have appeared violence.

" Once already," he said, " we have bidden

to each other the eternal farewell,—yet how soon again we meet! But now we part, never more to meet. To-morrow's sunrise will see my black ships ploughing the ocean; and in few weeks my foot will press my native shore. Farewell, generous youth! for ever farewell!"

With these words the two warriors embraced and parted. Edmund stood a while to watch the receding figures of the Sea-king and his little company; answered the adieu of their waving hands, just before they finally disappeared; cast one shuddering glance upon the dead; turned then away, and looked about for the monk that they might commence their journey.

CHAPTER VII.

In the excitation of the fray, and the subsequent emotion with which he had bidden farewell to those whom he might never see more, Edmund had forgotten his companion; and when he now looked about for him, the luckless brother was no where visible. A single glance showed him that he was not among the slain; and the conclusion to which he came was, that Elf must have ridden away with the rest at the sudden appearance of the Northmen. After walking some short distance, "yet he may," said he, "have escaped into the wood, and still lie there concealed,—I will at least call upon him."

He was about to lift up his voice, when a rustling in a tall elm tree that overhung the road just above him attracted his notice: he looked up, and, to his surprise and pleasure, beheld the form of the good brother descending from the topmost

branch with the activity of a wild cat. A very few seconds elapsed before Elf alighted, and with great haste ran towards him. Edmund could not forbear smiling at the dexterity with which the little man effected his descent.

"You are a bold warrior, my good brother," said he, "and a prudent. But now take horse, and let us begone with all speed before the night overtakes us."

"Truly," replied Elf, "I have small delight in the music of clanking steel; and withal have no instrument to play upon, so that I could have no business among such performers. But, for the love of Christ, Sir Edmund, where are we going? and where shall we make our supper? I have eaten nothing since my poor breakfast of cold boar's head, and a morsel that I had reserved in the pocket of my doublet, and which I ate uncomfortably as we rode along,—and now it seemeth to me as if I had fasted since Yule. Know you any good Christian in these parts, Sir Edmund, with whom we may have needful refreshment, and rest? The Lord preserve us from the hands of those horrid pagans who looked as

if they would have devoured us all alive! But these jaded horses will never carry us: they are as stiff as if their joints were cut out of wood. What *shall* we do! what *shall* we do!"

"Of a truth, my good friend," replied Edmund, dismounting from a steed which he had taken from those of the slain pursuers, "it were cruel in us to force the labour of these wearied beasts. Yet they may serve us on the morrow; and, if left here, may become the prey of wolves; or fall into the hands of those who will have less mercy on them than we. Alight, my good brother; take the bridle in your hand, and let us lead them on till we can find a place of rest for them and ourselves."

"But Sir Edmund," cried the monk, pulling with all his strength to drag on the exhausted horse, "if we go on at this rate, the sun will be up before we go to bed; and my tongue cleaveth to the roof with hunger and drowth. Ah! had not the knaves taken from me the good leathern bottle of choice mead that I had purveyed for our comfort on the way!"

"We must place our trust in Him who sent

the ravens to feed his prophet in the wilderness," answered Edmund, "and who, with but a few small loaves and fishes, fed a great multitude. Take comfort, my good brother: all will be well."

"If there were but a few nuts, or berries to be had," quoth Elf, "it would be somewhat for the staying of hunger: but not a thing for the tooth of man is there to be found at this profitless season. Acorns, a few, we might gather to be sure; but they never agreed with my weak stomach since the days of my boyhood, when I was wont to overfeed upon them, for want of other food atwixt meals."

"Vex not yourself, my brother," said Edmund, "with vain longings for that which you cannot have; but tell me rather, since the time now permitteth us discourse, the manner of your coming into these parts. Truly your appearance this morning at the Castle Kenwith amazed me, though the occasion allowed me not time to question you thereupon. And, albeit good service you came to render me in the matter of the horses, which of myself I might have found it

less easy to purvey on such emergency, yet grievously must I lament, for your own sake, that a brother of the cloister should have——"

"I cannot help it,—I cannot help it!" cried Elf impatiently—"You know the misfortune that had overtaken me:—I should have been punished with confinement, and fasts that would have broken my heart. I am no fit servant of the church:—a sweet voice of song mayhap I may have;—but fasts, vigils, cloisters, I cannot abide. When they suffered me to go forth unto the village, and the town, and the market, and what not,—it was all very well;—but, to pass my life in stone walls, like a toad in a rock,—let them hang me outright rather! I cannot, I cannot! You must be my stronghold Sir Edmund,—you must do battle for me with the prior and the brethren. Let them take no note of the past, and I will again be as a brother among them,—for truly, when I think upon the good kitchener, and the dainty fare, and the feast days, and the good neighbours of whom I was beloved, and plenteously cherished with

choice things,—ah ! Sir Edmund, then doth my heart yearn unto them all."

" Of this," said his companion, " we must think further; but, for the present, I would know of thy coming hither,—how thou knewest the way that I had journied,—and how, being but a foot traveller, thou shouldst so speedily have overtaken me who rode upon a swift horse."

" Now the Lord be good to you, Sir Edmund. Did not your own lips tell me that you journied toward the Castle Kenwith, to do battle against the pagan ? And, for foot travelling,—let me tell you that, with good viands to cheer my strength and inward man, these legs can hold it out with any four that ever carried horse hide above them. But touching my adventures on the road,—you shall hear, since somewhat it may help to beguile this weary way; and truly I think, Sir Edmund, that you take pleasure in my discourse, as indeed do many, though wherefore it becomes not me to say. Nay I do at times myself delight in hearing my own words,—for the which the good prior hath not seldom ad-

monished me, though mayhap it may have been that he himself——"

"But your tale, my good brother," said Edmund.

"Ay truly, that is more the marrow of this present time," returned Elf—"and you shall hear."

The little monk began accordingly with great minuteness to detail the incidents of his journey to Castle Kenwith; of which, though they might easily have been compressed into a few sentences, he contrived to make a good two hours' hard talk. It concerned chiefly the persons whom he had met, or overtaken,—the objects which he had seen,—the places where he had slept,—the full particulars of every meal which he had had the luck to fall in with;—all that he had thought of, and all that he had talked of. This discourse was delivered with infinite volubility and self-complacency. He required no reply, no question, no aid of another mind, to stimulate his own. He delighted to talk, and was proud of such a listener, though little aware that, during three-fourths of the time, his companion, busied with other and graver thoughts, knew not a word

that he had uttered. He came at last however to a close, and then felt, with aggravated keenness, the returning pangs of hunger.

"But now, for the love of holy church, Sir Edmund," he said, "let us leave these slow-legged beasts, and make speed of foot for some Christian house that may save us from starvation."

But Edmund reflected that, however the steeds might now retard their motion, they would be necessary for their journey homeward on the following days; and he therefore exhorted Elf to patience; and counselled him to employ his thoughts the while upon holy meditation, which would divert his attention from the wants of the body, and feed his soul with purer food. Elf was obliged to submit: but, ever and anon, the ejaculations addressed to his beast, and the loud snap of his jaws, like the closing of a steel trap, intimated the nature of his contemplations. The sun went down, and darkness had for two hours covered their path; and still there was no sign of human dwelling near. The chattering teeth of the poor monk now began to show signs of other affections than hunger. The

howl of wolves, sometimes at no great distance, made him oft-times doubt whether it might be the will of Heaven that he should that night eat, or be eaten. Yet he had trust in the valour of his protector, whose sword he had more than once heard whistling as it left the steel scabbard at the apparent approach of the prowler. They had long lost all certainty of being in a beaten track; and were now entering upon what appeared a waste land, of which they could not know the extent. Luckily for them, the sky was free from cloud, and the stars shone clear, or they must have been wholly unable to proceed. But they knew nothing of the country: and might, if they should attempt to cross the bleak waste before them, be for hours without the shelter of even a bush, and without chance of finding a habitation.

"Methinks, good brother," said Edmund, "it were better for us to tarry for the night beneath the shelter of the trees that we have just left. A few hour's sleep upon that bed of oak leaves which rustled under our feet were warmer and softer than the damp grass of these hills,

over which we may wander till day dawn, with our labour for our pains."

"Oh Christ preserve us!" ejaculated the distressed monk, "I shall never outlive this night! I am not like the righteous prophet who for forty days fasted, and took no food: and this thong of leather which for the last six hours, as it seemeth, my jaws have chewed upon, giveth to my stomach no ease from the pangs of hunger. Oh! the blessed viands that I have tasted in the kitchen of the kind Mollo! Oh! the savoury haunches, and the goodly pasty of eels, and the beef, and the mutton, and the tender flesh of the young kid, and the ———"

"Nay but, my good brother," said the youth, "all this will avail us nought: and bethink you, that if these good things are now lost to you, ——"

"Reproach me not," cried Elf,—"Oh! that I had tarried among the flesh pots of the ——"

"Hark!" said Edmund, "I hear the bark of a dog—some dwelling must be near.—The sound comes from the wood to the right."

"But the wolves," said Elf, ——

" But the chance of supper and bed," returned Edmund.

" Ay, ay! True! true!" said Elf: " and you have also your good sword. Let us assay the path. But shall we not leave behind us the steeds? Haply the way may be rugged, and they may stumble."

" We must put that to the proof," replied Edmund; " After so long encumbering ourselves with them, we will not, without necessity, abandon them. And, besides, the wolves will be no more agreeable to them than to ourselves; and they, you know my worthy brother, have no good swords to defend themselves."

" Yea, but their heels," said Elf, " are as weapons unto them. Nevertheless I would be loth they should come to evil end: so let us on, with God to speed."

" Hush!" said his companion, " The barking comes from the same spot as before; and doubtless proceeds from some abode of man. Follow me; and take good heed of your footing."

They moved onward then, and were soon enveloped in the darkness of the wood. Slowly

and cautiously Edmund went forward, feeling occasionally with his sword point the path ere he placed his foot upon it, and giving notice to his companion behind of any particular ruggedness or obstruction that he encountered. To these admonitions Elf made generally some short reply, in a voice which seemed to descend upon the ear of Edmund as if from the lips of a man of uncommon stature. This Edmund attributed at first to some property of the branches above, which, as from an arched roof, might send down the sound. But at length another cause suggested itself.

"Methinks," said he, "this ground which we descend must be much steeper than my foot would inform me of. The barking of the dog, which waxeth louder and louder, soundeth still far below, as in a deep dell—and your voice, my friend, appeareth as from one who walketh above me down a precipitous path. Seem your feet, my good brother, to tread as upon a steep hill slope?"

Now the good brother, be it known, had for some time been safely lodged upon the back of

his steed, as being a place where he could at once be more at his ease, and at greater distance from the teeth of the wolves, which he dreaded might at any moment make a spring upon them. Nevertheless, he liked not that this should be made known to his companion, who might perchance think lightly of his manhood thereupon; and he accordingly hasted to answer.

"Not so, Sir Knight," he replied: "Yet your voice seemeth also unto me as of one beneath me: doubtless it may be that——"

But at this moment the foremost horse made a dead stop. At full stretch of the bridle Edmund strove to drag him forward; and had succeeded in moving him one step, when his own foot sank, as into a deep hollow; and the strain of the bridle alone prevented him from falling outright. His right foot, which had slipped down above the knee, had found no bottom; and, after he had recovered firm standing, the utmost length of sword and arm could reach none. The sudden twinkling of a light before him at that moment showed him that he stood at the very edge of a deep precipice. He drew

back aghast, and warned his companion of the danger.

"Christ be good unto us!" exclaimed Elf, leaping down, and betraying by the noise of his alighting feet, the true cause of that peculiar altitude of voice which he had but just been prevented from assigning to some cause less derogatory to his personal courage:—"The saints have guard upon us!—what shall we do?"

"Give humble thanks," replied Edmund, "to the Providence who hath made these dumb creatures the instruments of our preservation. Had we listened to the selfish whisper that bade us abandon them in danger when they could no longer minister to our wishes, then had our own lot been indeed fearful."

"Oh Christ, oh Christ! what shall we do!" repeated Elf, in an agony of fear, from which Edmund could hope to free him, only by assuming a more cheerful tone, and subject.

"We must, I suppose," said he, "seek for some descent that is not absolutely a precipice. There is a light below; and doubtless a way to reach it. But this ground, methinks, must have

suddenly and strangely changed its position; your voice, my good brother, which but a moment back sounded like that of one above me on a steep descent, seems now like unto that of a man who descendeth before me. How account you for these things?"

"Truly, Sir Knight," returned the little man, unsuspecting that his companion had detected his change of position, "this is a strange and awful place; and Heaven only knows what may come next! Certes your voice also seemeth lifted up above me, whereas but now —— Yet let us not waste time in talk concerning such matters as are above mortal comprehension; but rather think how we shall escape this peril, and find the path to yon same dwelling, from which methinks even now I scent the smoke of savoury kid or boar-collop."

"I fear, my good brother, the smoke is in your brain, rather than in your nostrils," said Edmund;—"mine, at least, tell me of no such pleasant things: and, from the glimpse that yon light afforded me, our night's lodging, if indeed we shall be able to compass that at all, is more

likely to be in the cave of some anchorite, with roots and water for our food, than in the house of one who suppeth on fare such as thou dreamest of. See! the flame reappears.

At this moment a light that seemed to come from an opened door threw a dull gleam upon craggy rock, and tree-top at a considerable depth below; and shewed that the wanderers stood upon one point of a semicircular range of high rock, on the opposite curve of which, and seemingly about half-way down the cliff, stood the cave, or whatever else it might prove, from which the light issued. A figure, as of a man looking forth, for a moment darkened the entrance, and a voice was heard.

"Ay!" it said, "the signs are in the Heavens! —The day is at hand!—and the evil one will be abroad on the earth!"

The place on which the speaker stood appeared to be at the distance of some three or four hundred paces; yet every syllable fell distinctly on the ears of the wanderers, and was reverberated among the rocks, as in the walls of some

empty and silent temple. Edmund did not stay to listen for more, but lifted up his voice.

"Holy brother!" he cried, "We are wanderers in the night, and sore beset in this perilous place——"

But, at the first sound of his voice, the figure drew back, the door was closed, and all was again in darkness. Edmund shouted till the cliffs roared again: but no light reappeared, and no answer was returned. The barking of the dog, however, became loud and furious, but proceeded evidently from some place at greater distance.

"We must endeavour to find a path for ourselves," said Edmund, "for no help shall we have from him of the cavern, be he whomso he may."

"He is some robber, and no man of God," cried Elf, "or he would never close his door against a brother of the church, cold, wearied, and hungered, at this hour of night."

"Take you the bridle of my horse," said Edmund, "and I will try the way to the left. But do not attempt to leave this spot till I return."

"For the love of Christ!" cried Elf, "let me go with you! What shall I do here if ill chance should befall you! And said not he that the evil one was abroad upon the earth?—Think what I should do alone if the fiends were to come upon me—and I——"

"Keep up your courage, my friend," said his companion: "You have no fiend to dread so much as this darkness, and a supperless bed on the cold earth. I will go heedfully; and do not fear but that I shall soon discover a path, and return to lead you down. Bethink you, my brother, of some prayer for chasing away the evil spirits that come forth in the darkness; and let your heart be strong within you."

Elf, with great tremor, took the bridle of Edmund's horse, and listened to his retiring footsteps. He first tried to pray,—then to sing,—and then to whistle,—but he could not remember one prayer,—his voice quavered hideously as he strove to give vent to a "De profundis," —and when he thought to whistle a tune held in high esteem by his revered father the weaver, —now an angel in heaven,—his chattering teeth

inflicted such severe bites upon his sucked-in cheeks, that the tears started to his eyes. One of the horses, to increase his terror, began to strain at the bridle, and snuff hard through his nostrils, as though aware of the approach of some enemy.

"The wolf!"—said the poor man to himself; and was about to scream aloud, when, to his great relief, the sound of the horse's grinders informed him that the object of his straining and snuffing was somewhat more agreeable than the advance of a wild beast. But this again brought its own vexation. The pangs of hunger had been forgotten in the mortal terror of evil spirits, or impending death; but now, at the sound of jaws actually employed in the mastication of relishing food, they returned in full force upon him; and he longed internally for the stomach of a horse or an ass, that he also might find provision in the wilderness, and the desert places. The recollection of some fearful tale of demonry or ghostly apparition, began now to mingle strangely with the remembrance of some long past dinner of unusual delicacy, or some Yule-

eve supper, prolonged far into the night, and cheered by the ale-cup, the song, and the roaring ashen fire. At length, however, the voice of his advancing companion came to his ear; and his heart rejoiced to hear the tidings that a path was discovered, and that they might safely descend. In the same order as before, they proceeded cautiously on; and found themselves at last in safety below, and at the foot of some rough stairs, hewn in the rock, and just visible by the light of the stars. The wood-crowned cliff from which they had descended, appeared, against the clear sky above, of tremendous height; and Edmund shuddered as he thought of the imminent peril from which he had so narrowly escaped, when with one foot hanging over the abyss. There was, however, no time for lengthened reflection. The horses were secured by their bridles to a branch of a tree; and the wanderers began to ascend the rugged stairs, which led, as they felt assured, to the cavern from which the light had been visible.

"Speak not a word now, my good brother," said Edmund, "and tread softly. Perchance we

may come upon those with whom a night's lodging would be worse than a couch on the cold ground, even with the chance of a wolf for a visitor."

"God preserve us! Christ be with us!" ejaculated Elf; and then followed his companion in breathless silence. The stairs appeared to be cut into the very face of the rock; and shewed, at every ascending step, a deepening precipice to the left, over which a single slip of the foot might send them to destruction.

"Blessed saints!" said the poor brother mentally, as he looked upon the dark, and seemingly bottomless gulf below, "we climb like eagles to their nests in the clouds! But were it not that my foot is weak, and my head giddy with long fast, I could methinks——"

"Have a care, my brother,"—whispered Edmund, "we tread a dangerous path here."

They stood at this moment at a sudden angle of the rock, where the stair narrowed, and another dark terrific gulf opened directly before them. A single step in the direction they had

hitherto followed would have precipitated them to instant death.

"Follow me close," said Edmund,—"and keep your hand against the rock. Grant us a clear heaven, Oh God! for a single cloud now might make this to us as the valley of the shadow of death!"

"Send thy angels to us oh Christ!" said Elf with an inward shuddering, "let them take charge of us, lest we dash our foot against a stone!"

The stair soon widened again, and became less abrupt; and a level path at length brought them before a door fixed in the rock. The low voice of one within was now heard; and Edmund applied his eye to a thin crevice of the door, caused by the shrinking of the rough planks of which it was formed, that he might, before giving intimation of their presence, ascertain the chance of a safe welcome. He had heard of robbers who made their dens in such inaccessible places, and to whom plunder and murder were the business, and, as it was said, the delight of their lives. With such, and in a place whose advantages to them might set at defiance all bravery, he had

no wish to contend. A brief glance, however, shewed him that his apprehensions were groundless. In a cavern of no large dimensions, and lighted by an earthen lamp fed by the fat of some animal, sat a single figure, whose appearance bespoke him to be one of those anchorites who devoted life to austere devotion in poverty and solitude. Brother Elf, who peered anxiously through another crevice, sighed as he beheld the end of all his hopes for a substantial supper. Upon a heavy table of dark wood, supported on three clumsy legs, stood a rude crucifix, a skull, and cross bones, an earthen vessel that appeared to contain water, and a much worn volume, over which the wrinkled face of the bald-headed hermit pored with earnest gaze. Save the stool upon which he sat, there appeared to be no other article of furniture in this wild and miserable abode. The rocky walls, as far as they could be seen, were bare, except where a large hooked staff, resembling such as are seen in the representations of shepherds, stood in one corner;—even the humble luxury of a couch of dried leaves was no where visible. A soiled garment of the coar-

sest woollen, thickly patched, and girt round the waist with a band of straw, enveloped the meagre person of the hermit. The fingers of one shrunken hand, almost transparent from excessive tenuity, supported his head; and the palm of the other was spread upon the skull. The thin lips of the anchorite moved as he read; and ever and anon, as the subject stirred him, gave vent to the tones of a harsh, impassioned voice.

"He shall bring fire, and slaughter, and famine, —that the mother shall devour the infant at her breast,—and the son shall prey upon his father's bones——"

"God preserve us!" ejaculated Elf in a tone that was evidently heard within.

"Fiend!" cried the ascetic, turning toward the door a face in which appeared the gleam of insanity, "Get thee to thy place, and trouble me no more!"

Edmund now knocked gently.

"Ha!" cried the anchorite, "Comest thou bodily against me? Avaunt Satan! Spread thy black wings, and seek the pit, or by this sign I will vanquish, and trample thee under the foot!"

He lifted the cross as he spake, and started wildly upon his feet.

"We are Christian wayfarers, holy hermit," said Edmund.

"Weary and a-hungered," added Elf, "open thy door, and give us food and shelter."

"Ha!" cried the anchorite, "Comest thou in *that* shape to deceive me, foul fiend? But I defy thee, and spit at thee! Enter if thou darest! and behold that which will blast thy horrid eyes!"

He stood with the cross extended in his left hand, while he uttered this, and with the open volume in his right: his face was deadly pale, and his eyes beamed fire. Edmund gently opened the door.

"Forgive us, holy man,"—he said, as he entered,—"we are Christian soldiers, wandering through unknown ways, wearied and hungry. May we crave of you rest for the night, and food?"

The hermit stood his ground, and gazed wildly upon the gleaming armour, and the face of the speaker.

"Christian soldier, sayst thou?" he cried,—

" If thou beest the fiend, of a truth comest thou more as an angel of light. But the evil one hath power to take the shape of man or seraph,—darest thou kneel, and kiss this blessed sign of our salvation? Then indeed shall I know thee not to be of hell."

Edmund knelt, and kissed the cross. The countenance of the old man changed.

" Man then thou art!" he said, with a softened tone; " But ha! what hast thou behind thee? What horrid thing of darkness hath entered now?"

He resumed his frenzied stare, and started one step back, as the pale, wild-looking face of Elf approached from the door.

" I also, holy hermit," said the appalled brother, " am a man, and a Christian, albeit no soldier."

" Kneel to the blessed sign!" cried the old man, " kiss the holy book! if that thou beest indeed a man. Hollow and gaunt is thy look —Ha! Sathan! Thou tremblest,—thou bowest not the knee. Avaunt! get thee to the pit!"

He strode wildly forward toward the terrified

and shrinking monk, lifting up the cross and the book.

" Pardon me, holy hermit," said Edmund stepping forward,—" the good brother is fearful, but yet a Christian, and a humble servant of the church. Advance my friend, and fear nothing."

Elf crept on, and bent the knee, and kissed the book, his eyes all the time lifted keenly to those of the hermit, as if he dreaded some new and frightful thing to follow.

" Then thou also art not of the pit!" said the anchorite, " but what is it ye would have of me?"

" Shelter for the night, holy father," answered Edmund, " and food, though of the plainest, since long have we journied and fasted."

" Shelter I can give you from the night," answered the old man, " but your couch will be upon the dried fern. Food I can give you,—but not to pamper the appetite;—and drink can I also give you,—but not to inflame the blood."

As he said this he pointed first to a corner of the cave, where lay a meagre pile of dry shrubs, placed then on the table a black loaf, and

lastly replenished from a stone jug the water vessel from which he had himself been drinking.

"We accept your hospitality with thanks, holy father," said Edmund, looking around at the same time for somewhat that might serve for a stool.

"Sit you here," said the hermit, pointing to the seat from which he had before risen, "or take your place upon the couch. Few are they who visit the cell of Cuthred; and their feet tarry not."

Edmund sat down, and extended his hand to the black loaf, of which, however, he found but one-half remaining; the other portion being already in the hands of brother Elf, and undergoing a rapid transference to his stomach. With the sharp look of a starving hound, the little monk stood at the farther side of the table, eagerly grinding his own unsavoury food, and casting a longing eye upon that which was now in the temporary possession of his companion. The hermit, meantime, having replaced upon the

table the cross and the book, walked with impatient look and stride to and fro.

" Soldiers, say you that ye are?" demanded he;—" And with whom then in this land hath Christian soldier to do battle?"

" Know you not then, holy father," replied Edmund, " that the Northman hath again come like a locust cloud upon us?"

" Northman?" cried the anchorite, " Who then is he? Forty-and-four years have I dwelled in this place, yet have I never heard his name till now. Who, and whence is he?"

" Blessed have you been, holy man of God," returned Edmund, " that this wild beast hath not approached you. A scourge is he, a tormentor, a destroyer. The church, and the convent, the hut and the palace, hath he burned to the ground: he hath trodden the cross under his foot, and mocked at Christ, and poured out the blood of his servants, and spared not the grey head, nor the beauty of woman, nor the tenderness of the infant."

He was interrupted by a frenzied cry from the anchorite, and the trampling of his feet.

" Anti-Christ! Anti-Christ!" shouted he,

rushing to and fro with maniacal look, and lifted arms. Edmund started from his seat; and Elf, with wide eyes, and gaping mouth, which displayed a huge portion of half-chewed bread, stood motionless with horror.

"Heard I not his voice upon the hill top?" continued the hermit, "heard I not his shouting in the darkness when I looked forth to see the signs in the heavens? Art thou come then, son of the robber and harlot of Babylon? Hast thou bestridden Palestine with thy feet? Hast thou deceived the kings of the earth, the princes and the people,—and sent forth thy messengers among the nations? Now shall the dead trees shoot forth leaves,—and the fire-flood shall fall from heaven,—the winds shall be at thy bidding, —the rivers shall run backward,—the dead shall be raised,—the waves of the mighty deep shall be lifted up! Ye shall see! ye shall see! The hidden treasures shall be brought to light,—the Christian shall renounce his God,—fire and sword, famine and pestilence, shall come abroad. Then shall Rome perish and be no more,—and the kings of Gaul shall be in the dust. But *he* shall arise, the chosen of France,—the last, the

greatest of kings. He shall go triumphant to Jerusalem: he shall lay down his crown and sceptre on Mount Olivet. Then shall Anti-Christ appear,—Gog, and Magog shall rise out of the earth. The last, the greatest of kings, shall march with his armies against them: he shall overthrow their strength,—he shall conquer all the earth,—he shall burn the idols,—he shall bring back the worship of Christ—he shall gather together the Jews. Then, then, then, shall the kingdom of God come!" *

He ended his rhapsody with a loud shriek; and sank upon the floor. His guests had hitherto remained standing in silent astonishment; but Edmund now hastened to the old man, raised him in his arms, and laid him upon the bed of fern. He breathed; but appeared utterly exhausted, and strengthless. Edmund spread over him a piece of coarse, thread-bare, cloth, that seemed once to have been a robe, but was now probably used as the hermit's sole bed-cover; and then, rightly judging that rest alone could

* For these notions of the coming of Anti-Christ see Alcuin.—1211-1215.

restore his exhausted powers, left him without speaking a word.

"Is he gone?" whispered Elf, with a look of horror.

"No," answered Edmund, in the same cautious tone, "He lives; but weak as an infant. His brain is crazed beyond doubt: sleep alone can restore him. And now, my good brother, the sooner we also close our eyes, the better methinks for us. There is another couch in the corner behind you. Help me to take off my armour, for cold iron is but comfortless bed-gear. Yet make no noise,—and put up your prayers in silence."

"Did he not take me for Anti-Christ?" whispered Elf.

"Hush," said his companion,—"The poor man's mind is wholly deranged: but you need have no fear of him. We will depart with the first dawn: our horses, I trust, will have warmth in the sheltered spot where we left them; and if they do not find so much food as we could wish, we must provide amply for that on the morrow."

"But to think that he should take me for Anti-Christ!" resumed Elf, as he assisted his companion to unarm; "Yet what can be expected of a man's wits who lives upon such detestable bread as this. Shall you eat no more?"

Edmund replied in the negative; and Elf, taking up the remains of the despised loaf, retired with his companion to the hard bed. The last sound that met the ear of Edmund, who, after putting up a short prayer, speedily fell asleep, was the quick, hard grinding of the jaw of his hungry bed-fellow. Elf dispatched his last crumb; and heard from the other end of the cave a heavy breathing which comforted him with the assurance that the mad recluse was asleep, and, for the present at least, harmless. His own lids then dropped; and he was speedily transported in blessed vision to the kitchen of the priory, where he held a long feast upon interminable dishes; and slaked his drowth from an everlasting fountain of generous ale.

But the morrow was destined to change the tomb-like stillness of the cell to sounds such as it had never before witnessed.

CHAPTER VIII.

Spite of his meagre supper, and hard bed, the sleep of Edmund was heavy, and prolonged to an hour later than it was his wont to indulge in. As the morning drew near, however, vivid dreams of battle agitated him. He fought again his terrible combat with the gigantic Hubbo—but he himself was now the vanquished; and the brutal shout of the monster, as he drove the sword into his heart, rung horribly in his ear. Yet still he seemed to live; and, while lying strengthless upon the gory ground, heard the shouts and the tramplings of the victorious enemy as they pursued and rioted in the slaughter. He strove to rise—but his limbs were dead: the uproar gathered around him—the yells of the wounded—the groans of the dying—the demon laughter of the pagans, grew horribly louder and more loud,—till in his agony he started, and

awoke. His dream had not been for nought. Steps were on the rocky stair,—voices were heard,—and, before he could leap from the bed, the door burst open, and eight or ten armed men rushed in. He caught up his sword, and stood on his defence, yet expected that the next moment might be his last. Poor Elf, at the same instant, leaped up, and beheld the dreadful Northmen: slunk then back to the corner, and sat cowering upon his hams, staring, trembling, and with mouth agape, looking for certain and speedy death. The aged hermit, meantime, raised himself from the couch, rubbed his dim eyes, and gazed in fear and wonder upon these strange visitors. The Northmen, whose numbers every moment increased, till about twenty had crowded into the cell, appeared at first somewhat disposed to mirth; but that mood lasted not long.

"By the eyes of Freya!" cried a tall warrior in complete mail who first entered, "you have a marvellous cunning nest here my friends: but we may take the eggs from this eyrie without much peril of neck, I trow, in spite of the long

talon in your hand, sir eagle of the leathern wing. Put up your sword, you had best,—for we are rather more odds, you may notice, than enough for a man in a cuirass of buff."

"Ha-ha! Sir hermit of the bald scalp," cried another, "you looked not for such saints to share your orisons, I suppose. Come, up with you, old straw-belt, and let us see what relics you have to work our conversion with."

"Why, what godless men are ye?" cried the anchorite, standing up, and gazing with a horrified look at the profane jesters. "If ye too be Christian soldiers, where have ye learned to scoff at the blessed relics?"

"Well done, old round-skull!" shouted another, clapping the hermit on the shoulder; "be his mass-priest this fine morning, and read him a lesson that shall make him show more reverence to a holy man like you. A bad Christian is he I fear me,—but thou shalt have him on his knees, before thy beard grows black yet, old boy."

"Here is thy water pot, so please your goat-ship's reverence," cried a third, presenting the drinking-vessel, "baptize him, and save his soul

from Zernebock; and let his name be called Twitch-the-beard, old leather-chops."

The brutal fellow, accompanying the word with the act, plucked at the old man's chin, and burst into a savage laugh at the indignation which he aroused by it.

"Godless! heartless! mannerless wretch that thou art!" cried the hermit. A loud laugh arose from all. "Wretches that ye all are!" continued he; "who are ye?"

"Shame upon you!" cried Edmund with an overpowering voice. "Beasts as ye are, can you not respect grey hairs, and weakness?"

All turned to the speaker, and renewed their laughter.

"Look at the old fellow's trumpery!" shouted one, rolling the skull upon the floor.

"Look at his cross-sticks, and mass-book," said another, skimming round the book, and flinging it like a quoit to the farther end of the cell; while a third, snatching the cross from his hand, sent it whirling to the roof, and then kicked it through the door over the edge of the precipice. The hermit was horror-struck at sight

of this enormity: he lifted his arms, gasped, stared, and vainly endeavoured to speak. Loud peals of laughter burst forth at sight of the old man's contortions; but the indignant voice of Edmund again drew on him the attention of all.

"Ye are not soldiers," he cried, "to make your mockery of that poor, strengthless old man. Cowards! and blasphemers!—would that my armour were on, and I exposed singly, sword to sword, with every one of you!"

New bursts of laughter replied to this.

"Thou art a valiant springald no doubt," said the same tall warrior who had before addressed him: "but let me advise thee to keep a quieter tongue, or like enough it is thou may'st be sent after the bauble yonder over the rock side."

"No barbarity could surprise me from wretches that mock at God, and make their laughter at the aged and helpless," replied Edmund, with firmness. "Ye were not so merry that night when ye fled like scared sheep before the Saxons under the walls of Kenwith."

This speech instantly changed the mood of the Northmen.

"What knowest thou of that?" demanded one who entered at the moment. The voice was startling, from its depth and harshness. Edmund looked at the speaker, and thought he had never beheld a more fearful and ferocious being. In stature he was not above the middle height; but his limbs were those of a bulky Hercules. A mouth of unusual width, a broad, flattened nose, with distended nostrils, and eyes that squinted in opposite directions, together with an expression of low cunning, impudent daring, and absolute brutality, composed a countenance that might have suited the painter who would depict some spirit of darkness. His hair, and bushy beard, were of a dirty red, his eyes of a yellowish tint, and had that glassy stare which often marks the intemperate drinker. The whole person reminded Edmund of the gentle Oswulf, but was yet more disgusting, and far more fearful.

"What knowest thou of that!" was the demand of this monster. Edmund looked upon him, and was about to reply, when the tall warrior first mentioned whispered to him.

"Keep a calm tongue in your head now," said he, "or Heldor will do that for you in earnest, that I spake of in jest only. Mind me,—a quiet tongue, or a leap over the precipice,—that's all your choice."

The Dane alluded to, while this caution was uttered, had been answering the raillery of his companions upon his late arrival, and his evident shortness of breath, caused by the length and steepness of the ascent. He turned then again upon Edmund.

"What knowest thou, I say, of the night at Kenwith yonder? The curse of Odin upon the heavy-headed fools that could not keep their eyes open when an enemy was perched over their camp!"

"I know," answered Edmund, "that the countrymen of those who are now so valiant against an old strengthless man fled then like howling curs before the sword of the Saxon. I know it, for I myself beheld it: and I know also that the fiercest and the strongest here would have fled as fast as they."

"And you doubtless, sir Saxon of the terrible

face," said Heldor, "were foremost among the dastardly crew that suddenly became such heroes against sleeping and drunken men: You enacted wonders I dare vouch,—as indeed did you all, in your own report. Come,—have you no tale of desperate prowess to tell, that may make us all take to our heels again to escape your single arm, even though we should jump headlong over yon pretty rock side, to save ourselves from your wrath?"

"It is not the use of the Saxon soldier," replied Edmund, "to boast of what he has done. I did my best,—let that suffice: and perhaps some of you may have reason to regret that I did so well."

"By my troth," cried a soldier, stepping forward, "he has but just challenged us all to single combat in defence of the old bald-head there.—So have a care Heldor how you jest with him."

"Then, by the right hand of Odin! he shall have his wish," said Heldor: "On with your iron, if you have it, Sir Saxon, and away with you down the rock ladder there, since scarce

room is here for sword play; but there will be no stint on the fine green below; and we shall soon see then whether one man may not satisfy your stomach, without needing to call for a score beside."

"The Saxon shall have fair play Heldor, if you are for this game," said the tall warrior before-mentioned; "And if you have the worst of it, mind he shall go free."

"That is as it may be, Rhinulph," answered Heldor; "You want to come Earl Sidroc over us, with your fair play, and free-scapes. But I heed not,—even so be it. If he can foil Heldor, in the name of Zernebock let him be off. I wish but that the bragging Saxon who took Prince Hubbo shorter by the head were here in his place."

"Come come Heldor," said Rhinulph, "your morning's draught has been overstrong. Your head would not stand so long on your shoulders as you would desire it, against such a playfellow, and methinks you are like enough to find as much as you can wish for with this youngster."

"I have always your good word, Rhinulph," said Heldor sulkily: "but perhaps you think yourself the better match for him,—and if so—"

"Nay, nay," cried Rhinulph, "fight your own fights, the challenge was none of mine. But we waste time here. Come, Sir Hermit," —advancing toward the old man, "have you no gewgaws better worth our notice than what lies above board here? Some little golden saint, or Christ of silver, with a crown of jewels, or such like, you could find for us, I dare say now, if you would. Out with them, my old friend, while the play is good, and you shall get off with a whole skin: and a saint, or a Christ, of wood will serve you just as well."

"Ye are the robbers then," exclaimed the old man, "that I have heard of! Forty-and-four years have I dwelt in this cell, and never till now hath the foot of the wicked entered. But ye are accursed! thieves, and scorners, and enemies of God. Saints of silver and gold, say you? Wretches! ye have bereft me of the one holy sign that hath been for four-and-forty years my comforter. Ye have cast upon the floor and

trampled the blessed book of our salvation, that hath been my only riches, my study day and night! Away with you—impious! robbers, and blasphemers—and——"

"Silence your brawling, you old dried bladder!" cried Heldor, with a voice that made Edmund almost fancy he heard again the roar of Hubbo: "Silence I say, or I'll tear your fool's tongue out of your scare-crow jaws!"

The old man, utterly astounded by this thunder of fury, became suddenly mute; and stared upon the speaker with the look of one who has just received a stunning blow on the head. A loud laugh arose at his expense: but the attention of all was now called another way. Edmund, assisted at times by one of the soldiers, had by this time got on his armour, and finally taken his shield from the ground, where it had lain with the face toward the wall. The buckler was no sooner seen upon his arm, than it was recognized as that of their standard-bearer.

"The shield of Amleth!"—shouted several voices at once. All crowded to look; and every

man was eager to question: but the voice of Heldor rose over all.

"Where *stolest* thou this?" he demanded.

"From no man," replied Edmund: "thief can never be fixed upon *my* name."

"Who gave it thee then?" continued the Dane.

"No man," was the reply.

"Palter not with me Saxon, on thy life!" cried Heldor:—"Whence hadst thou the buckler of Amleth? how came it to thy hands?"

"From the hand of him who bore it before me,—from the hand of Amleth, if such be his name. I took it from him in the battle."

"Liar!" exclaimed Heldor with fury,—"*Thou* take the shield of Amleth? Liar, and thief! thou hast stolen it from the spoil. *Thine* eye dared never have looked upon the face of Amleth. The buckler was taken by him who captured the Raven, and overcame Hubbo,—we heard it from the wounded who crawled during the night from the field."

"It was,"—returned Edmund, "and the man who did these things now stands before you."

"Then, by all the gods of Valhalla!" cried Heldor, "he shall not boast it before us long. Stand nigh to the door some of you, lest this mighty hero give us the slip: and you, Sir Invincible, pray come to the side of your grandfather here, for we would talk a little by ourselves, and this is no large council-room."

"You have claimed the fight with me, and agreed to the conditions," said Edmund, as he passed over to the side of the hermit,—"and I pronounce that man *Nithing* and infamous who abjures his word."

Heldor cast a grim look at Edmund, as the latter spoke this,—then, without reply, gathered his fellows around him at the opposite end of the cave, and began a low discourse, of which occasionally a word or two reached the ear of Edmund, although he was himself engaged in speaking to the poor old anchorite in tones of kindness and encouragement. These few words were, however, sufficient to convince Edmund that the matter of the conference affected his own life in the most immediate manner. One single phrase at length, accompanied by an ap-

propriate movement of the arms and body, assured him that the ferocious Heldor was instigating his fellow-ruffians to hurl him over the precipice. A low hum of satisfaction was heard from some, but others shewed signs of dissent; and the face of Rhinulph, which appeared for a moment to the eye of Edmund among the throng of heads, expressed strong indignation. He was then seen to address the warriors; but not a word was audible to Edmund, though his gestures shewed strong emotion. Several others spoke; and there was evidently a great division of opinions. Edmund, meantime, stood in silence, and anxious suspense. He felt little doubt that the conference would terminate fatally to himself; and, if so, he had no resource but to sell his life as dearly as he could. He looked to the door, and meditated a rush in that direction: but the four soldiers who guarded it were keenly on the alert, and their swords were drawn for instant action. There *must* be impediment sufficient to give time for every weapon to be upon him; and he might therefore better await the distant chances of a more favourable resolve

on the part of his enemies. He thought also of poor Elf, whom, if he could himself escape, he must abandon to certain death: yet that, again he thought, must be equally sure, whatever his own fate might be. His resolution then was to await the event as calmly as he could: and meantime he breathed an inward prayer to that God in whose hands are life and death, to man and to all things. The conference still continued, but wholly inaudible to the person chiefly concerned. There was, however, one ear, not among the secret council, upon which almost every word fell with horrifying effect.

The hapless brother Elf, who had for some short time sat cowering in the dark corner behind the door, had seized a moment when all eyes were turned toward the other end of the cave, and slipped with despatch and silence under the bed of fern, where he had since lain with palpitating heart, bathed in cold sweat, and listening with agony of terror to all that passed. He had heard distinctly the savage proposal to fling his noble protector over the tremendous precipice, and with difficulty had suppressed a

convulsive scream which was forcing its way from his open mouth. He heard, with breathless anxiety, the speech of Rhinulph, which opposed this act, and demanded that the prisoner should be taken to the camp, there to be adjudged by the general voice. Another he heard who advised that the Saxon should be offered up as a sacrifice to appease the angry gods, who had suffered evil to befall them: and another, that insisted he should be given into the hands of Godrun, the brother of Hubbo, from him to receive the fate that his deed merited. Some there were who spoke of large ransom that might be had from the Earl Oddune, together with the Raven standard perchance, in consideration of their giving up the captive to his hands: and others, who insisted that a severe vengeance upon him would be better than any ransom, or any advantage that could be purchased by letting loose such a scourge again upon them. No one opinion seemed to sway the rest; and poor Elf remained in a state of torturing uncertainty for the fate of his beloved protector, which drove him well nigh distracted. The sad

necessity too for lying so long in one constrained posture was, to his quicksilver limbs, and restless impatience, no small annoyance. The conference, however, though still as undecided as ever, was at length brought to a close. Advancing from his fellows, Rhinulph on a sudden addressed himself to Edmund.

"You tell us, Saxon," said he, "that by your hands the Raven standard was captured, and Prince Hubbo slain."

"And in that I have told you the truth," replied Edmund.

"The Sea-king Sidroc," continued Rhinulph, "was also overcome; but afterwards set free by some Saxon warrior: tell us the name of that man."

"The Sea-king Sidroc," returned Edmund, "was overcome by no man: but he was in peril from a host, and was rescued therefrom by one who owed to him his life."

"Name that man," said Rhinulph.

"He was the same," replied Edmund, "who afterward met and slew the ferocious Hubbo."

"And thou art he?" demanded Rhinulph.

" I have said it," was the reply.

The Dane turned to his companions: " If this be so," said he, in a low tone,—" and to my ears it sounds like a true tale,—we must either let the Saxon go free, or carry him with us that Sidroc may himself pronounce upon him, for, as I take it, there is no one here that would willingly cross swords with the dark Sea-king: and that he must expect to do who puts shame upon a man that has stood his friend thus."

" You forget," said Heldor, " that Sidroc is again a prisoner, or perhaps slain: he has not, at least, returned since his mad fit carried him, as they say, like a cloud-bolt among the Saxons after his wife and daughter."

" And that is true," rejoined Rhinulph. Turning then to Edmund, " If you be in truth he who set free the Sea-king Sidroc," said he, " you may tell us perhaps what chance hath befallen him since he returned among you to demand the queen Aslauga and her daughter. When we left the fleet yester noon, he had not been heard of."

"The Earl Sidroc," replied Edmund, "was yesterday released from the castle; and returned last night at sunset to the ships. I was with him; and he spake of crossing sea with this morning's dawn. If he be not set forth, there will you find him."

"Then to him," said Rhinulph, "shalt thou tell this tale: and wo be to thee Saxon, if thy tongue hath spoken falsely."

"And, if falsely I have spoken, then say also I, wo be unto me. Let the event show."

Rhinulph looked upon his companions; and a low brief conference followed. The face of Heldor was dark and portentous. "For eight years," whispered he apart to one of his fellows, "have you and I fought at the side of prince Hubbo, and shared the spoil with him: may my right arm shrivel up if I avenge him not upon his slayer!"

"We must wait our time," was the reply: "let these have their way now."

The opinion of Rhinulph seemed now to meet general approbation; and he again turned to Edmund.

"We depart now to the ships," said he, "and thou must go with us, Saxon. Surrender then thy arms, or swear on thy sword blade that thou wilt make no attempt to escape by the way."

"My arms I will never surrender but to irresistible force," replied Edmund,—"and a vow on the sword were from me a mockery equal to yours on the blessed cross, in which you believe not. I am now in your power. Take the word of a soldier, that, while honourably dealt with, I will not strive to escape from it, till Earl Sidroc hath vouched for my truth,—or until, at least, we shall have reached the ships."

"And *after* that," said Rhinulph, "you will find it no safe or easy thing to accomplish. Comrades, shall we take his terms?"

All agreed; and Edmund was ordered to walk in the midst as they descended the stairs. As he prepared to follow six or eight Northmen from the door, he cast his eye around the cave in search of the little monk, but could no where see him. A slight protuberance upon the fern bed, it is true, suggested to him the probable hiding-place of that hero, but he trusted that

he might remain undiscovered, and forebore therefore to make any mention of him. Elf was in no hurry to reveal the secret; and his protector left him with a silent commendation to the care of Heaven. Many weeks elapsed before the fate of either of these oddly matched friends was known to the other.

It was not without a shudder that Edmund, as he reached the edge of the rock before the entrance, looked down upon the abyss over which he had expected to be hurled; and the still higher cliff over which, on the preceding night, his foot had hung, excited a horror yet more intense. He breathed his silent thanks to the Being who had protected him in such peril; and then trod the gently sloping path which led to the precipitous stair at the angle of the rock before described.

But all had not left the cavern; and the uplifted voice of the hermit made Edmund fear that the old man's tormentors had not ceased their mockeries.

"Northmen! Northmen!" was the frenzied

exclamation: "are *ye* then the slayers, and the burners, and the men of the evil one?"

A loud and savage laugh overpowered the vociferations, which still were heard at intervals, in the tone of one maddened by horror and indignation. Edmund stopped, and turned to Rhinulph, who walked close behind him: "For the sake of your father's gray hairs," said he, "return, and free the old man from these indignities."

"Impossible!" cried Rhinulph,—"Am I to make feud with my comrades for a little sport with a crazy old anchorite? They will just clear his den for him of his trumpery, I dare say, and then leave him to babble his curses after them. On Saxon! we cannot stay here, perched like seamews half-way up to heaven."

Edmund stood at this moment upon the second step, at that giddy point where the rock shot out like a sharp promontory into the abyss which lay before, and to either hand of him. The single step which he had taken round the angle had shut out from his ears the direct sounds of laughter and of execration, which now came to him

only in confused echoes from the opposite cliff. Suddenly, however, a loud and distinct cry was heard, as if descending through the air. "Anti-christ! Anti-christ! Anti-christ!" Three times it sounded,—and each time with diminished loudness. A dull blow, as from the fall of some heavy substance, was then heard; and the cry was repeated no more; but the cliffs again resounded with bursts of brutal laughter.

"That's over foul sport now with the old man!" said Rhinulph, looking back,—"but Heldor must have his play out, one way or t'other."

Edmund remained motionless with horror. "The curse of God will visit this deed!" he said, in a tone of deep energy: then resolutely attempted to pass upward on the narrow stair, dreading that poor Elf might be exposed to the same fate, and resolved to risk every thing to prevent it. "Northman!" said he to Rhinulph, who opposed his passage, "dispute not my way. In yonder cave——"

He was proceeding to tell the cause of his anxiety, when the voices of the approaching murderers, in high exultation over their act, came to his ear: he felt a conviction that the monk had been

undiscovered—stopped abruptly in his speech,—turned, and descended.

"When next you take up your lodgings with the eagles," said Rhinulph to Edmund as they reached the ground, and prepared to depart; "take heed not to leave your horse below to tell what sort of bird may be found in the nest. We should not have taken the trouble of climbing half sky up after a fusty hermit; but a steed and caparison like yours, Sir Saxon, betokened something worth mounting for."

Edmund made no reply: his heart burned within him, and he vowed that the horrid deed should not go unpunished. All were quickly on horseback, the captive riding in the midst on his own steed. Rhinulph rode to the left of Edmund, and heard from him a full account of the connection betwixt Sidroc and himself, together with the chief circumstances attending the release of the Sea-king. The Northman was not without some generous feeling; and, though he promised little, he inwardly resolved to do what he could for the high-spirited young Saxon. How far he succeeded in this object will be shown in the progress of the narrative.

CHAPTER IX.

It was with no very agreeable sensations that our hero found himself, as a captive, approaching an army of ferocious men, maddened by their late defeat, and likely to take the most horrible vengeance upon one who had so materially contributed to it. He regretted now that, in the impulse of the moment, he had avowed himself to be the captor of the flag, and the slayer of Hubbo; yet knew not how, without stooping to falsehood, he could have evaded the declaration. The most fearful result was to be dreaded: but he had also some little to hope. "Sidroc," he said to himself, "may have delayed his departure: he will confirm my words—he will be my champion,—and his voice must prevail. I shall then be set free—I will fly to the king: I will vindicate myself in the eyes of all men. Sigifred must ere now have learned by whose hand he was deliver-

ed from death: the tale will reach the ear of Elfrida: it will be told to the king: it will be bruited abroad: the release of the Northman will be atoned for by the capture of the Raven, and the conquest of Hubbo: my name will be sung by minstrels, and applauded by warriors:—let me but escape this peril,—and what may I not then hope for?"

Such were the consolations that the youth whispered to his heart: but he was doomed ere long to feel a bitter disappointment. The first soldier of whom enquiry was made gave information that Earl Sidroc had set sail at sunrise: his ships, struggling against a contrary wind, were still visible far out at sea, making for the coast of Wales; and it was impossible to recall, or overtake them. The face of Heldor gleamed with a fiendish joy when this was heard: he cast a glance of anticipated vengeance upon the captive, and whispered to his comrades on either hand.

"It will go hard with you, I fear, Sir Saxon," said Rhinulph in a low tone: "there be those among us who would demand your life, as the slayer of Hubbo, though you had set free twenty

Sidrocs. Had the Sea-king remained, you might have escaped, for there are few who would like to measure swords against his iron arm. But I believe your tale, and will befriend you as far as I can,—though that perchance may not be much."

"A hundred men," replied Edmund, "witnessed that I drew sword for Earl Sidroc, even against my own countrymen: surely their report will be listened to."

"The men you speak of," returned the Dane, "must have been the followers of Sidroc; and doubtless are gone with him. Again, I say, I will do what I can for you: and, if die you must, you will know how to meet your end manfully. But what can they be about yonder on the cliff-top? Some new fleet, I gather, making landward."

"'Tis the old Sea-king Haco," answered a soldier to whom the question was put, "he has been in a frenzy since the night of the battle, and is resolved to take the death-leap."

"Spur on comrades," cried Rhinulph, "and let the Saxon see how little a Northman fears to

die." The horses were instantly urged to full speed.

"I have no desire to witness such a spectacle," said Edmund, "and deem that impiety which you praise as heroism."

"And that may show you the reason," answered Rhinulph, "why the Saxon has been for so many years the prey of the Northman. You cherish life, and lose it,—we risk all, and are victorious. But your eyes are not likely to be hurt by too near a view of this: we come too late. The crowd falls back, and the old man advances alone. Stop comrades! and let us see the end."

Every horse was instantly stayed,—and all looked on in silence. Though shuddering with horror, Edmund could not turn his eyes from the fatal sight. On the flat top of a high overhanging cliff, at some distance, he beheld a small human figure with outstretched arms run feebly forward towards the brink,—leap headlong,—once rebound from the side,—and then fall like a stone to the bottom. A silence of a few seconds followed;—a feeble sound was then heard, like the

plash of a heavy thunder drop upon the earth,—and all was over.

"May God have mercy upon his soul!" said Edmund, as he watched the falling spot through its long terrific descent;—"he knows not what he does!"

"Brave old chief!" exclaimed Rhinulph, as they again pushed on, "the halls of Odin are now for ever opened to thee!"

"That death must be answered for too!" cried Heldor, with a malignant scowl upon Edmund. "Haco need not have died if the cowardly Saxon had not stolen upon sleeping and unarmed men."

Edmund was about to reply to this, when Rhinulph motioned him to forbear;—"Give him no advantage over you," he whispered; "a quiet tongue will be better for you now than a shield forged by the dwarfs. You will soon know your fate, and till then, hear and be silent."

Edmund saw the prudence of this counsel, and resolved to attend to it. They soon reached the camp, if such it may be called, where not above half a score of tents were standing,—though the

number of men seemed still to amount to some two thousand. Of these, however, Edmund perceived that but few were completely armed. Some had lost shields, some swords, some spears, and a few appeared wholly without weapons, these, together with their tents, and a great booty amassed during years of plunder, having been abandoned in the hurry of their flight.

The news that the slayer of Hubbo, and the captor of the Raven, was now entering the camp as a prisoner, quickly spread, and all crowded to behold the hateful enemy. Looks and words of the most horrible portent convinced Edmund that he had nothing to hope. Resistance was out of the question, and escape seemed impossible. The good-will of Rhinulph, and a few of his friends, could avail nothing against a host thirsting for vengeance, and he had no resource but in reliance upon heaven, and in manly endurance of whatever might befall him. Amid insults and savage threats, from both men and women, he passed on till they reached the tents. In one of these the leaders were soon convened; and the captive was brought before them. To the fierce

question he returned a firm and dignified reply: avowed himself to be that which he had said,—craved for no pity, and trembled at no threat.

"I am in your power," he said, "and I expect no mercy. But remember that for one of yourselves is it that I have outraged my own countrymen, and fallen into this peril. The Sea-king Sidroc was in bonds, I released him, and came with him upon the way. The sun was going down when I left him in safety;—but little knew he, when he spread his sails at that sun's next rising, that the man who had wrought out his freedom was himself a captive in *his* cause, and to *his* countrymen."

He spoke to men maddened by their loss, and greedy of revenge.

"The blood of Hubbo cries from the earth against him!" was the general exclamation: "The Gods have given him to us as a pleasing sacrifice! Let him die before the sun goes down!"

Their fury was terrible; and many a sword was half drawn, as if to inflict instant death. But this was opposed. The victim was to be

reserved for more solemn end. His shield and sword were demanded, and surrendered without a word: and the captive was conducted to another tent. Thither Rhinulph attended him.

"I can do nothing for you now," he said,—"they are greedy for your blood as famished wolves. But at evening I shall demand another council, and, meantime, will speak privately with some of the chiefs. The tent you are in is mine, and I shall order your wants to be carefully supplied. Would that a tempest might drive back the dark Sea-king! for no other than he, I fear, can save you. But we must all die at some time or other,—and what great matter when or how, so that we die like men. The knife of a priest will bring death as quickly as the sword of a warrior. I do not bid you hope to live, for then you will be less prepared to die,—but I will speak for you. Sidroc is feared,—and by some liked well,—though many there be who breathe the freer for his absence. I have heard him speak often and kindly of you,—and remember well your slipping us at the bridge of the Nen, where, plague upon the greedy pool! I lost

that which I have never since made up. But, however, as I said, for the sake of the Sea-king, and being, as you may be called, a sufferer in his behalf, I will do you a kind turn if I can. So now, the good day to you, young Saxon: and I hope that your bad plight will not dull your appetite when the broiled deer's flesh is set before you."

"I trust I shall know how to meet my fate," replied the youth: "meantime, accept my gratitude, and may God speed your endeavours in my cause! Life is ever dear to man, and most dear at the hour when it seems most sure to be cut off. In a great cause, man may glory to die;—but to perish ignobly, in cold blood, offered up like a beast to a false god———"

"Stay Saxon!" cried Rhinulph hastily, "Odin is the god of gods—The sacrifice is honoured whose blood ascends to his nostrils. Fare you well."

He quitted the tent as he spake these words: and the victim was left to his meditations, which, as may be supposed, were sufficiently miserable. Certain and horrible death stared him in the face:

he had no hope,—no resource but calm endurance, and a trust that the dark gate of death would give him a passage to the mansions of bliss. Prayer to Christ for pardon of his sins, and for support under his agony, mingled with bitter thoughts upon all whom he loved, and must never more behold. He saw before him the pallid countenance of the noble Elfrida, sorrowing, but not with outward tears,—her majestic form wasting like a goodly tree on which the blight hath fallen: he beheld the gentle Ethelburga, heart-broken, and bathed in tears, that for long days would scarcely cease to flow: the generous old thane, with his jovial face darkened now, mourning for his adopted son: the kind Kentwina, active still, and bustling in her household affairs, but mixing oft with the querulous command, a sudden sigh for the lost youth whom she had loved as her child:—he saw the thoughtful face of his first loved father, the pious Cynewulf, quivering with suppressed grief,—the sublime, yet meek, countenance of his august friend and monarch, lamenting in silence the untimely fate of one for whose

future happiness he had promised to care. He thought upon his unhappy country, doomed to a long struggle with foes so ferocious and terrible: and with bitterness he thought that he was to be snatched away at a time when every heart and every arm should devote itself to her cause. But there was a Power above, he still reflected, without whose permission not even a sparrow could fall to the ground: whatever doom might await him, under the eye of that Great Being must he still remain, and His will must ever be better for man than the accomplishment of his own short-sighted desires.

Of such nature were the thoughts and emotions of the high-minded youth, in this time of fearful peril. But his reflections did not continue uninterrupted. The voices of his guards without filled him often with indignation at their brutal merriment over his impending fate: a fierce countenance at times glared into the tent, and disappeared: twice, a kinder face, that of a woman who placed before him his food, and who looked upon him with evident pity, awoke

gentler feelings: but the heavy hours passed on and the friendly Rhinulph did not appear.

The day was drawing to a close when, by the voices of the guards without, he gathered that his fate was about to be made known to him: and, almost immediately after, the covering of the tent door was drawn aside, and two white-robed figures entered. In their pale, stern features, and furrowed brows, he instantly recognized the priests whom he had beheld in the tent of Hubbo: and as instantly predicted that they came to announce his doom. They stood a moment in silence, looking upon their victim. One of them then, in the same deep, severe tone that had already met his ear, thus addressed him:

"Saxon! art thou he by whom the son of Ragnar perished? Answer us, and in the truth, —for, as thou speakest, even so shall it be done unto thee."

"Hubbo fell by my sword in battle," was the fearless reply: "by my sword he fell, but the arm of God directed the blow: and not to save

my own life would I recall that act of righteous vengeance!"

"Peace, babbler!" cried the priest in a stern tone: "thy life is now less than a span, and worthless as the stubble trodden in the mire! Fool! didst thou deem thyself the vanquisher of the terrible in battle? By the arm of God truly he fell; but not by the god of thy folly,——Odin, the severe, the awful, the active and roaring deity, sent to his approved warrior the Valkeries, the virgin chusers of the slain,—the god of battles called him to the eternal feast of heroes. He drinks now the mead from the skulls of his enemies: all day he joys in the battle, and all night he banquets in the halls of Valhalla! But even from the grave shall his arm reach to punish thee! The body of the hero will to-morrow rest beneath the lofty mound, that shall tell to unending ages where sleeps the dreaded in battle: but to the wolf and the wild dog shall thy carcase be cast, and thy bones shall whiten and rot in the sun. Saxon! at the third hour of the morrow shall thy blood be poured forth. In the cold grasp of the mighty dead shall the knife be put,—and the

hand of Hubbo shall yet deal thee the blow of vengeance. The doom is pronounced,—speak not, but prepare to die!"

He extended his arm as he commanded silence, and passed abruptly from the tent. His companion also lifted his arm, as he turned to depart, "At the third hour, and by the hand of Hubbo, prepare thee, Saxon, to die!"

He disappeared as he concluded these words, and the tent was almost instantly filled with soldiers, acting under the command of the savage Heldor, who stripped from the unresisting victim his armour, and bound him with cords, in such a manner that he could not stir a limb. He was then laid on the ground, and left to await his miserable doom in darkness and solitude. To the coarse insults of his enemies he made no reply; he asked of them no pity; he prayed for no indulgence. He felt that he had still the battle to fight, but his weapons were now of the spirit. He could no longer confront his enemy with the sword, and buckler, but he could defy him by an unconquerable heart. Calmly to endure, was now to triumph; and his spirit

rose to the strife like a warrior at the blast of the trumpet. To one only man did he vouchsafe a word, and he opened his lips but to threaten.

"Monster!" he said, turning a steady and severe eye upon the odious Heldor, as the wretch drew tighter the cordage upon his limbs, "thy hour, be sure, will come. Not for this petty malice, but for thy hellish deed in yonder cave, do I bid thee tremble. That feeble old man is now a strong spirit armed with vengeance against thee; and the chastisement will not linger. Laugh, demon! if thou wilt,—but the tormenting barb is already in thy heart. I speak no word more."

"Oh most valorous!" returned the grinning wretch, "in mercy withhold not the sweet music of thy tongue. Bethink thee how brief a time remaineth for thee now to rejoice our ears with thy most goodly discourse. Too soon shalt thou be with that same strong old bald-head spirit; and then the one gentle member of thine which still remains unbound by the hands of wicked men will be even as helpless as this most mighty arm which slew the warrior in battle. What!

not one word to console our sorrowing hearts? Call again upon the grey beard, most Christian champion,—summon the strong spirit,—bid him break thy bonds. Bid him come, armed with cross and skull, and put to flight the horrid one who cast his reverence like a dead dog from his holy place among the clouds. Or call at least on thy good friend the cloudy Sea-king;—bid him hasten in his dark ships to his beloved Saxon boy! Wilt thou not cry unto him and say, 'to-morrow the cold hand of Hubbo will grow warm in the heart of thy deliverer,—hasten and save him, valiant Sidroc.' Nay then, if thou beest so niggardly of word, we may even retire, and weep alone at thy unkindness. The good night to thee, sir valiant,—and pleasant dreams on thy soft couch. At the third hour of the morrow doubtless thou wilt speak out,—and even open thy whole heart to us,—ha-ha-ha. Thy Christ be with thee, sweet patient blossom, so soon to be plucked. I'faith thy unkindness well nigh breaks our hearts. Fare thee well! fare thee well!"

With a fiendish laugh the mocking wretch left

the tent, and darkness quickly closed upon the helpless sufferer. Body and mind were in torture, but no word of complaint escaped him. The hard trial had commenced, and he was resolved to support it. Yet, even in this extremity, a faint gleam began to dawn upon him. The wind, which all day had opposed the course of the Sea-king, rose now with a violence that might yet compel his ships to give way, and seek the shelter of the harbour. That night of bondage might then end in a morning of freedom. Should Sidroc land, at every risk would he brave the blood-thirsty crew: in his turn he would cut the fetters of his friend, and place the sword in his hand, and stand to the last drop of blood in his defence. "Speed his bark, oh God!" he said with fervency, as the hope kindled within him,— "Swiftly let thy winds bear him hither! Let him cleave the billows as an eagle riding upon the tempest!" An involuntary struggle, as he uttered these words, made him more bitterly feel the hateful bonds that held him helpless as an infant. He calmed his momentary impatience, and

added, "Yet in thy hands am I,—do with me even as thou wilt!"

A gently treading foot was now audible in the tent, though in the darkness nothing was visible. It advanced toward him; and a trembling hand began to slacken the hard drawn cords. A tear fell upon his forehead,—stifled sobs escaped,—but not a word was yet spoken.

"Woman!" said Edmund in a low and almost tremulous tone,—"art thou come to release me?"

"Hush!"—was the reply, breathed in the softest whisper. "I come to give thee ease, but freedom I dare not, cannot give thee. The guards are without: thou couldst not pass them. A worse death would come upon thee; and I also should perish. One among them, for love of me, and for the sake of the Sea-king Sidroc, hath aided my entrance: but he watches the door, and would bury his lance in thee as in a wolf, wert thou to attempt escape. But thy bonds will not gall you now: I must away. Hark! he strikes his spear upon the earth. It is the sign. Farewell, poor youth. I will visit

thee again, if I may be admitted, and bring thee food."

The spear was again heard striking impatiently upon the ground, and the kind-hearted woman hastily withdrew. "May the blessing of Christ be upon thee!" said Edmund, breathing now more freely, and released from the anguish of the cutting bonds: "even in the desert hath the good seed been sown."

Voices and footsteps advancing were now heard, and the flare of lights penetrated the canvass of the tent. Soon after, the covering of the door was drawn aside, and Rhinulph entered, followed by a soldier who bore a torch. The man lighted a small lamp,—then bowed and withdrew. The Northman sat yet a while in silence, looking intently upon the face of the captive, who, with equal earnestness, returned the gaze. The face of the warrior was flushed; and, when he removed his helmet, the big drops shewed that he had just come from some task of no light toil. He seemed about to speak, when two men, bearing food, entered. At the command of Rhinulph, they set free the hands

of the Saxon, and placed beside him on the ground a wooden trencher, amply filled with broiled venison, cut into such portions as might be eaten without the aid of a knife, an instrument supposed to offer, even to a Saxon, so circumstanced, too tempting an invitation to self-destruction. Edmund had fasted long, but felt no inclination to food. After taking a few morsels in silence, he desisted. An attendant set before him a silver-rimmed horn of the Urus, filled with mead. He tasted, and put down the vessel. Rhinulph signed to the men, and they left the tent: "Eat, Saxon," said he, in a low tone; "and take of the cup: you may perchance require it still."

The youth fixed his eyes upon him, and awaited his words.

"I bid you eat," resumed the Dane, "and in that I bid you hope;—yet not overmuch. A soldier ought never to despair. This tempest may drive back the Sea-king. His ships were still visible as the sun went down. If he return with the dawn, you will surely live: if he return not, you still may hope. Heldor, in the

hearing of many, defied you to the combat: he promised you freedom, should you foil him: but, when he knew you for the vanquisher of Hubbo, he evaded the trial. By him have the chiefs been urged to sacrifice you; and my words have been unheeded. If Sidroc come not back by the third hour, you will be led forth to die on the grave of Hubbo, whose body hath this day been ransomed. Proclaim then aloud the defiance of Heldor, and demand the battle. If he refuse it, brand him as a coward: call him Nithing and infamous. He dare not live with that spot upon his name: but, if still he keep back, I will myself fling the shame upon him, and your fate may be averted, should he fall by my hand."

Edmund's face shone with renewed hope, at once, and with gratitude, for generosity so unexpected. "Noble Dane!" he cried, extending his arms, "how shall I——"

"Hush!" said the Northman, lifting his finger, and pointing all round the tent;—"those are about us who must not hear one word of this. Well for you, Sir Saxon, that the tem-

pest speaks yet louder than your voice, or in that speech might your hopes have been extinguished, as a torch in the waves. But you owe me little; and may spare your thanks. Somewhat perchance for love of the Sea-king, and for pity upon you, do I move in this: but for my own quarrel more. Not to Heldor, but to me, were you the captive; and yet my voice hath been unregarded, and his hath been heard. There have arisen hot words between us, and swords have been out. We were stayed from the fight; but in my heart I swore to cross him. Two hours have I toiled at the oars, hoping that we might reach the ship of Sidroc: but the tempest mocked us, and we returned. Should the third hour bring no other aid, you know your course. Eat then that you may be strong; and take of the cup that your heart may not fail you. Heldor is a lion in battle, though a fox in cunning, and in cruelty a wild cat: if you cross swords with him, you will find it no child's play, unless your arm be of steel like that of the dark Sea-king."

"But that my limbs may be stiff with these

bonds," said Edmund, "little should I fear him, were he——"

"The cords must again be on you," returned the Dane,—interrupting him; "but they shall not gall you overmuch. But, if Heldor accept your defiance, demand then an hour of rest, that your limbs may be restored to strength. I will give my voice for you, and you will not be refused. Eat now, and in silence, for the night wastes, and I would be at rest."

The injunction was obeyed. The tent was soon cleared, the bonds were again put upon the captive: the Dane threw himself on his couch, and all was settled for the night.

Sleep soon descended upon the weary Northman; but Edmund closed not his eyes. His limbs, though not as at first painfully compressed by the cords, were still under most irritating constraint; and his bed was the earth. The tempest howled without, and shook the tent as if threatening to rend, or overthrow it. The waves burst in thunder upon the beach. In the intervals of the gusts, he could hear the slow tread of armed men without; and, ever and

anon, by the fluttering gleam of the lamp, he beheld the face of some cautious guard thrust in at the entrance, and again withdrawn. Wearily passed the hours: the lamp grew dim in the ray of morning, and the captive had never forgotten his misery in one moment of sleep.

CHAPTER X.

The tempest had begun to subside at day-break; and Edmund waited impatiently to hear if the ships of the Sea-king had returned to the harbour. Rhinulph hasted to look forth. The vessels were still visible, but driven far west-ward; and in such billows no boat could put forth. One hope, therefore, was cut off; and the last resource must be tried. Again the Dane urged his captive to take food, and man his heart for the event.

Two hours passed on; and the camp was in a stir, expecting the sacrifice. The laugh, and the brutal jest, were heard without, and the deep and bitter execration. The blood of the victim was called for: the slayer of Hubbo must have his reward. But other tones mingled with these: the name of Sidroc was heard from female lips, and the Saxon was spoken of as his

deliverer. Yet few were these voices, and feeble, as of those ashamed to plead in a good cause.

The third hour was half consumed, and the stern priests came for the victim. His feet were unbound, and he was commanded to walk to the place of death. With a calm brow he passed from the tent. A priest at either hand walked close beside him: all round were armed men. Slowly they moved; and the priests chanted the dismal song of sacrifice.

They ceased not till they had reached the place of sepulture. A fire was burning there, a huge grave was dug, and a bier, covered with black cloth, stood beside it. The soldiers crowded around, but without speaking; and the priests awaited till the stir should be subsided. All was at length still: the victim stood by the bier,—and the priests removed the black pall. It was not without a shudder that Edmund beheld the corpse of Hubbo, grasping in its pallid right hand a dagger. The stiffened fingers had been bent; and were bound with strips of gilded leather firmly round the handle of the weapon:

the gigantic arm was bared to the shoulder. The hideous head had been placed upon the neck;—but the wide gap could not be hidden. The features were those of a sleeping demon. Edmund looked for a moment; then turned with loathing from the horrid sight.

"The hour is come, Saxon!"—said the elder, and sterner priest,—"The ghost of the slain demands thee! The gods await the steam of thy blood! The banquet is stayed in the hall of Odin,—the eyes of heroes look from the clouds to behold the vengeance!"

"Reverend men!" said Edmund, as there followed a moment's pause,—"may my voice be heard?"

"Ere the rites begin," answered the priest, "mayst thou have leave to speak:—but let thy words be brief. After that, open not thy lips to profane the worship of the terrible and roaring deity."

Edmund bowed,—then turned toward the chiefs, who stood apart from the soldiers, and lifted up his voice so that all might distinctly hear.

"Men of the north!" he said; "I speak to you as a warrior unto warriors: hear me, and rightly judge, or else shame will cover you for ever. I am in your power, and you have condemned me to die: but why am I now your captive? Because, for the sake of a Northman, I braved the anger of the Saxon: because I delivered the noble Sidroc from his bonds, and shared the perils of his escape. And is this then the reward that you give me? Had I suffered the brave Sea-king to perish, I had myself been in safety. But I braved the anger of my countrymen to save *his* life,—and it is by HIS countrymen that I am sentenced to lose my own. And for what crime? Because, in fair and open fight, face to face, and foot to foot, I slew my enemy!"

Heldor, at these words, stepped forward to speak, but was instantly opposed.

"Let the Saxon be heard!" was the cry of the captains.

"He says but the truth!" exclaimed female voices from behind the soldiers:—"The Saxon ought to go free!"

Heldor cast a lowering look about him, and retired. Edmund caught at the words of the women, and went on.

"Truly is it said among you, that the Saxon ought to go free: but he would first purchase his freedom."

"No ransom!" shouted Heldor.

"No ransom," cried Edmund, looking firmly at the Dane, "that money can pay, would the Saxon offer. Men of the north,—it was in fair fight, my sword 'gainst his, that I slew my enemy; and in fight as fair should warriors seek their revenge. If, because I slew Prince Hubbo in battle, ye bring me to this death, your renown is blackened,—your very women and children will cry 'coward!' upon you. Your own countrymen will point the finger, and say, 'ye trembled to meet the Saxon in fight, and therefore slew him in bonds, like an ox in the slaughter-house!' Is there not among you one who dare avenge a warrior's death by the arm of a warrior?"

He paused, and looked fixedly upon Heldor.

There was a murmur among the captains, but no reply was made.

"Is there not *one* among you," he resumed, "who hath already given challenge to the captive, and promised freedom as the reward of victory? Is there not *one* here that answereth to this?"

He still kept his eye upon Heldor; then, after a pause, addressed himself to all.

"Warriors of Odin! do ye not hold him infamous who, having spoken the word of defiance, refuses to meet his adversary?"

"What means the Saxon?" was the demand among the captains, "Which of us hath defied him?"

"Men of the north!" continued Edmund, "there *is* among you one that hath done this: and there are among you a score of men who can bear witness to my truth. I repeat it, there *is* among my captors one that hath dared me to the combat, and hath promised me freedom if I should vanquish him. If he of whom I have spoken hear now my words, and still refuse the combat that he hath offered,—a coward do I proclaim

him in the eyes of all,—*Nithing*, and infamous for ever !"

At the sound of that word, so odious among the northern nations that no man, without utter degradation, could remain under the stigma, there was an instant tumult among the assembly.

" Name the man !" was the universal cry. Heldor at the same moment started forth, calling out for silence; and immediately avowed himself to be the challenger.

" But I knew not," he added, " when I offered to chastise the insolence of this Saxon, who had boasted his wish to meet, one by one, a score of brave Northmen, because forsooth they had made sport of an old bald-headed anchorite with whom he had kenneled;—I knew not, I say, that he was the same who had shed the blood of our leader, and captured our magic banner. What would ye have said to me, had I put to death with my own hand the man who had so deserved the vengeance of you all ?"

" We should at least have said," cried Rhimulph, standing forth, " that you had better

proved your valour than by inciting us to put him to death like a beast. But you knew the safer part, Heldor,—and have shown yourself to be wise as well as valiant."

"Foul-mouthed villain!" retorted Heldor, advancing toward the speaker, "I will teach *thee* to know the safer part, though neither wisdom nor valour hast thou to show: and the time shall not be long ere thou learn it."

"And if one of us do not profit by the lesson," replied Rhinulph, giving back his look of defiance, "the fault shall not be mine. When and where thou wilt, let thy instruction begin: but, meantime, thou hast another pupil under thy hands, and mayst thyself perhaps learn somewhat to thy advantage,—unless truly, thou still deem it easier and safer to commit him to other masters."

Several of the captains here interposed, and demanded if Heldor persisted in the challenge that he had avowed, or if he would lie under the reproach cast upon him by the Saxon.

"If ye shame not," was the reply, "to take back the victim that ye have vowed to Odin on

the grave of your leader, I would meet him, were he ten men instead of one!"

A general applause followed this determination: the priests were appealed to,—the combat was pronounced to be lawful,—and the bonds were immediately removed from the limbs of the prisoner.

"I have sent for your armour and weapons," said Rhinulph,—"but will you not demand an hour to recover strength?"

"Not a moment!" was the reply: "Have your chiefs confirmed the conditions of fight? shall I be set free if I overcome yon brutal man?"

"Appeal to them," answered the Dane, "and, if they consent, be assured that the terms will be held sacred."

In a brief address, Edmund then questioned the Northmen; and the universal voice pronounced that the terms of the challenge should be adhered to.

The heart of the youth bounded within him; and his countenance glowed with delight. But he thought not of the fate that awaited him.

His arms were brought; and Rhinulph was himself assisting him to arm, when a sudden tumult arose. "The Saxons! The Saxons!" was the cry; and a body of horse was beheld rapidly approaching. Instantly the trumpets sounded, and the Northmen hasted to arrange themselves for battle. On the brow of a gentle hill beyond the horsemen, the ensigns of another, and more numerous, force of foot-soldiers now appeared; and the ill-armed Danes had to expect a contest under serious disadvantage. In the midst of the confusion, Heldor came behind the Saxon captive, who was now prevented from arming, lest he should give aid to his countrymen, and, with a hideous oath, drove a dagger into his back. Edmund looked upon the monster, whose face expressed the exultation of a fiend,—attempted to speak,—grew faint,—staggered, and fell.

The deed was not unobserved; but no one at such a moment thought fit to question it. Rhinulph, who might perhaps have sought instant vengeance upon the perpetrator, was marshalling

his men for the battle: and the bleeding body was left unheeded upon the ground.

After looking for a moment upon his victim, whose face showed the signs of approaching death, Heldor, with a demoniac smile, but without uttering one word, sheathed his dagger, left the spot, and hasted to arrange his followers.

A long oblivion came over the senses of our hero; and his first waking was like the beginning of a dream. Strange noises seemed to be about him; strange motions to disturb him. His dim eye pictured somewhat like a female form hanging over his couch: but, when he attempted to look with surer gaze, all vanished. When he strove to recollect where he was, or what had chanced to him, his head swung, and a sudden blank came again over him, like a cloud blotting out the sun. His first positive sensation was that of pain, yet even this he could not with certainty refer to any one spot; nor could he recollect any thing that might have caused it. By degrees his vision strengthened: he saw more clearly the face of a woman leaning

over him: he felt that his head was raised, and that some vessel was applied to his lips. Feebly he swallowed the liquid, which he yet could not taste; and became soon conscious that vital warmth was gathering within him. But again came darkness and forgetfulness. He awoke afterwards, as from sleep. Faint recollections, but flitting and disjointed, began then to visit him: his perceptions became more vivid: strange noises came more distinctly to his ear, above, below, and around: he felt that he was rocking to and fro in a manner that he had never till then experienced. His strengthening sight now shewed him that he was in a small apartment, lighted by a single lamp: but he no longer saw the female figure that had tended upon him. In a short time, however, she re-appeared; and, as the door opened, the voices of men, lifted to their highest pitch, came mingled with the sounds of a tempest, and a roar and dash as of waves in furious commotion. Again the countenance bent over him: it was that of the woman whom he had seen in the tent of Rhindph; and, with the recollected features, came a re-

membrance of much that had befallen him. He looked upon her, and feebly strove to speak. His lips moved; but the sound was fainter than an infant's breath. She, however, understood his wish; pressed his hand; and, in the gentlest tone, bade him remain still, and all would yet, she hoped, be well with him. "You are in the ship of the Sea-king Rhinulph," she said, "and with those who will do you no wrong. Ask no questions now; but remain quiet, if you would not be your own enemy. The same friendly hands that slackened your fetters in the tent are still ready to serve you. Let that content you for the present. When your strength returns, you may ask, and hear, all that you will. Sleep now, if you can: and comfort yourself with the thought that you are no longer a prisoner."

She saw his eyes brighten, and his lips again move; but hasted to prevent further attempt to speak. "No, no," she said, holding up her finger,—"not a word, or I leave you. Take food in silence: then close your eyes, and sleep, if you would have strength to use the liberty which is intended for you."

He felt the kindness and prudence of this advice; composed himself, and soon sank into a long and refreshing slumber.

It was broad daylight when he awoke; and, by the greater clearness of his faculties, mental and corporeal, he felt assured that sleep had much strengthened him. He recollected now with distinctness all the events that had preceded his long insensibility; and remembered also, but with less certainty, his first return to sense, and the cheering words that had been spoken to him. The female, however, was not in the apartment; and, when she returned, he read upon her face an ill concealed anxiety. His voice was now so much strengthened, and his whole appearance so much improved, that she did not hesitate to hold discourse with him. Mingling frequent admonitions to hear with calmness, and to speak no more than absolutely necessary, she informed him of the occurrences that had followed his fall by the dagger of Heldor. Every now and then, she interrupted her narrative to give him small portions of food, and drink; or to communicate with persons in another part of the vessel: and

Edmund noticed that, after every absence, her face expressed increasing anxiety. The cause of this she, however, appeared reluctant to tell; and he forbore to question her. The deed of Heldor, she informed him, had soon reached the ear of Rhinulph, who gave instant orders for his removal with the utmost care to his own ship. A desperate, but brief, attack had been made by the Saxons, who had been ultimately repulsed, though not till after considerable loss on both sides: and the retreat of the enemy had been followed by a hasty burial of Hubbo; and a furious combat betwixt Rhinulph and Heldor. This had been stopped by the intervention of the other leaders, but not till after Rhinulph had received a severe wound. Dreading the future treachery, or open violence, of Heldor against Edmund, Rhinulph had given instant command that he should be taken away in his ship, and set at liberty with all that belonged to him, so soon as his strength would render it safe to put him on shore. This order had been complied with; and the vessel had been all night labouring to get up the narrow sea, with the intention to make

the port of Brightstowe.* Here it was designed that the captive should be left in friendly hands till his health and strength should be restored, while the Northmen, followed in another ship by Rhinulph, would hasten to join themselves to the army of Godrun, at Chippenham. The winds, however, had blown contrary, and with such violence, that the vessel had at length been compelled to give way, and run before the storm. They were now, she said, off the coast of Cornwall; and discontent had arisen among the seamen, some of whom attributed to the presence of the Christian the violence of the tempest; and were urging the necessity of putting him on shore, weak as he was, in the first harbour they could run into. "But for the sake of the queen Aslauga, who loves you Sir Edmund, and for the sake of the Sea-king Sidroc, whom you have served," she added, "I have striven for you, and will strive to the last. Should you now fall into the hands of your countrymen, unable as you are to defend yourself, your peril would, I fear,

* The Saxon Bristol.

be as great as from the vengeance of Heldor himself. Fiercely did they demand that you should be given up to them; and I tremble for your fate, should you now fall into their power."

Edmund could not but feel surprise at the seeming inveteracy of their indignation; but begged, nevertheless, that he might as speedily as possible be set on land. A deathly sickness which soon came over him appeared to present a danger as great, in his then weak state, as any that he could incur on shore; and it was at length determined that the ship should run into a harbour at no great distance, and that he should be committed into such safe keeping as the shortness of their stay would permit them to look for. It was with great joy that Edmund heard this intention; and he passed the intervening time, when not overcome by sickness, in making farther enquiries of his kind nurse, and in offering her his heartfelt thanks for her goodness. From these enquiries he learned that she had formerly been in attendance upon the queen Aslauga, from whom she had parted on the occasion of her mar-

riage to a Danish soldier who had, a few months since, perished in battle.

"You may perhaps," said she, "remember Rolf, who brought you from the monastery. Poor fellow! he led but a wild life of it,—and yet I sorrowed for him bitterly."

"I remember him well," said Edmund: "was he then your husband?

"He was," replied she: "And you may then recollect perhaps the handmaiden of the queen, Cutha, who nursed you in your illness——"

"I do, I do," said the youth,—"What was her fate?"

"Cutha has again tended upon your sick bed," she replied: "I am she. Well did I remember the chain of gold, and the sparkling cross that you had round your neck when Rolf brought you to the queen; and, credit me, I did not leave it long about you when I removed your doublet to stanch the wound made by that fierce Heldor, who will yet, I hope, meet the reward of his treachery and cowardice, if there are men left among us."

"The chain is safe then?" said Edmund eagerly.

"Safe, and whole," replied Cutha; "and now it may, I think, be restored to its place. Your armour and weapons also are safe; and I will see that they are left with you when I quit you on shore."

While she spoke this, she drew from a pocket the chain and cross; and carefully put them round the neck of the youth, who knew not how to express his gratitude for her disinterested kindness.

"But that they were the gift of my mother," he said, "freely would I bestow them upon you, gentle Cutha, as a slight reward for all your goodness: but, if my purse have met with equal good luck, I may yet have the means to—"

"Speak no more than needful," said she, interrupting him: "your gold has been untouched: and, if you can, without distressing yourself, offer me some small sum, I will not refuse it, because I know that it will set your heart at ease. And it will not be unwelcome to myself neither,—for likely is it that I may soon have

another husband; and he will not think the worse of me for my having a trinket or so to set myself off with."

Edmund remembered that Alfred had liberally supplied his purse, and begged that she would at least divide it with him. This, however, she refused to do, but accepted some half-dozen of silver coins, which, with a look of gratitude, but without the utterance of a word, she transferred to a small embroidered purse, the gift, as she said, of the queen Aslauga.

The ship now reached harbour; and the Saxon was carefully removed on shore, attended by Cutha. A middle aged female was soon found who, after her first alarm at the sight of armed men had subsided, undertook the care of the wounded warrior. He warmly thanked the Northmen who had shown such generous treatment to an enemy; and, after distributing a few coins to such as would accept them, bade a kind farewell to all. Cutha was the last to quit him, but not till after she had seen that his arms were safely deposited with his future nurse: nor did she without tears part from one whom she al-

most loved, and could not hope to see again. After warmly thanking, and commending her to God, Edmund sank exhausted upon his humble bed; and soon heard that the vessel had again put forth, and was bounding upon the waters.

Here, for the present, we must leave him. Profuse bleeding had hitherto prevented fever; but this soon commenced, attended with great pain from his wound, and symptoms that threatened a fatal end. Weeks elapsed before his health and strength began to return; and he was yet ill fitted to encounter fatigue when, impatient to appear before the king, and clear his fame, he resolved to set forth upon his perilous journey.

CHAPTER XI.

We trust that the reader may have been sufficiently interested in the character of our stately and high-souled Elfrida to feel great dissatisfaction at our apparent long neglect of her. Yet those are often most cherished in thought, whose name comes seldom from the tongue. The novelist that would please, must relate action chiefly; and pourtray passion only as that action gives it birth: but the tale of long enduring and passive grief must be told by every heart to itself. Even the dramatist, in his three short hours of feverish emotion, must tell a story of events, as well as of sufferings. He may perhaps be classical and correct with but three characters, and one unvaried scene, yet he will not long interest an audience of men who commonly feel that action is life, and passive endurance existence merely. Words may easily, vividly, and with

durability of pleasurable excitement, present to the mental eye objects, or events; but will not long continue to please when they toil to express the obscure workings of the heart only. A few graphic lines place incidents before us, like a moving picture before the eye of a quiet spectator: but, when the language of mere emotion is to be understood, we ourselves must labour with the writer. All therefore that we have to tell of the noble Saxon lady, since the day that she parted from the object of her affections, must be compressed in few words. Let the beautiful and noble-minded Elfrida be for a time pictured to the mind's eye, silent, reserved, conscious of a well-placed love, proudly indignant of look or word that could express doubt of her perfect purity,—tremblingly alive to aught that would vilify the character of him whom she had shrined in her heart. Let her eye and brow be then seen to kindle as the first news reaches her of the heroic deeds of her beloved warrior: let them in the next hour darken with anger and disdain as she hears the rejected tale of that warrior's treason to his country. Let her, fi-

nally, be seen pale, speechless, tearless, almost motionless,—withering, as it were, with cureless, unutterable grief, at the heavy tidings of her hero's capture and death. Let this sketch be filled up by the fancy of the reader who may take interest in her emotions, and the object of the writer will be attained. Certain considerations there were, in truth, which somewhat consoled her in her afflictions; but these cannot now be mentioned. She believed that the one object for which life was prized by her had perished; and, if some glory shone upon his grave, it could never warm the cold remains beneath. She was steeped in grief to the very lips, and her only hope was soon to be called to that place where her noble lover would hasten to meet her, never more to part. With this we must for the present leave her; and proceed with a hasty notice of the state of the country at the time when our story recommences.

Nearly five months had now elapsed since the great invasion of Godrun; and the Northmen still remained in the neighbourhood of Chippenham, revelling upon the spoil, and seemingly

unambitious of farther conquest. Alfred, meantime, whom we left just entering upon his difficult task, had unweariedly laboured to arouse in his desponding subjects a spirit of resistance, and to induce them to collect for one decisive blow their scattered strength. He had aroused the hopes, and subdued the jealousy of his nobles. Troops were in readiness, and the signal for simultaneous march was expected. But the wise monarch would know, from the evidence of his own eyes, the actual state and strength of the enemy, before arousing him from his torpor by the sound of the battle trumpet. Disguised as a harper, he sought the camp of the Northmen, and beheld them in their strength and their weakness. He found them in all the confidence of victors, immersed in sensuality, undreaming of danger, disdainful of caution. From his perilous enterprise he returned unharmed, and sent forth his summons to the field. The march of the troops was to be secret and swift. At an appointed day, and at the stone of Egbert, in the forest of Selwood, * all were commanded to

* The wood reaches from Frome to Burham, near

meet their king. The day arrived, and beheld an army of men devoted to their monarch and their country. Two days only were allowed for the necessary arrangements; and on the third they marched toward the camp of the enemy at Ethandune, in Wilts. Obscure rumours of a Saxon force, assembling in some quarter unknown, had reached the ear of Godrun; and to this place, therefore, though with slight apprehensions of any real danger at hand, he had called in his widely scattered soldiers. Darkness had fallen when the Saxon army reached Œcglea, a village in the neighbourhood of the hostile camp: they silently took possession of an adjoining hill, where they passed the night; and early on the morrow advanced rapidly upon the unprepared enemy.

It was a glorious morning of May, and the Northmen, each as he listed, were luxuriously

fifteen miles in length, and six in breadth. 1 Gough's Camden, 78. *Seal*, in Saxon, is a willow tree. This was, therefore, a wood of willows; and so the MSS. Claud. names it, sylvam salicis.—Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, Vol. ii. p. 88.

banquetting upon the plain beneath their vast intrenchments, when a moving forest of steel, flaming bright to the sun, was beheld rapidly approaching. In an instant the shout was sent up; the trumpet, the cymbals, * and the harsh drum, re-echoed among the hills. To them replied the Saxon war cry, the trumpet, and the clash of sword and shield; and in brief space of time both armies encountered in tremendous shock.

The Danes had been surprised in a moment of festivity, unordered, and mostly unarmed: but their mail, and their weapons, were at hand: their discipline was at best but slight, and every man trusted for victory in the valour of his own arm. They had the confidence of men accustomed to success,—the haughtiness of long undisputed conquerors. With the joy of the war-

* The Cymbals are very small vessels composed from mixed metals, which, struck together on the concave side, with skilful modulation, give a most acute sound, with delectable coincidence.—Bede, Op. Vol. viii. page 1062.

rior then they hasted to the battle; and furious and long was the struggle for mastery.

Godrun, king of East Anglia, brother to Hubbo, and the sole surviving son of the renowned Ragnar Lodbrog, fought at their head. Much inferior to his gigantic brother in personal strength, he possessed equal courage, and far superior intellect. Addicted to sensual pleasures, a sitter at the banquet, and a slave to women, he had yet energy for action, when called upon; and shrewdness to take advantage of circumstances for the furtherance of his designs. He was reposing upon a rich couch beneath the shadow of a spreading elm, enjoying at once the delicious breath of a May morning, and the voice of a female songster who struck the harp to a lay of love,—when the cry of alarm, and the glitter of hostile steel, aroused him. But with him this was only a change of measure and mood: the love-lay was but varied to the chorus of battle, and he himself, from a quiet listener, transformed to a rapturous leader of the new band of enthusiasts. With a start like a mettled hunter at the sound of the horn, he sprang forward to the

chase. The boar was coming on, furious and fearless; but the spear was quickly in his hand, and he hasted to give him the meeting. Shout answered shout,—and the name of Odin, and of God, pealed up to heaven.

Among the Northmen the battle-cries were, "glory! honour! contempt of death!"—among the Saxons were heard, "for God! for our country! for our homes! our wives! our children! our fathers! our altars! our religion!"

If by personal strength, skill in arms, and reckless daring, alone, the contest might have been decided, to the untamed barbarian must victory soon have belonged; but against the mere *soldier* were opposed the strongest weapons of the *man*. Against individual strength, skill, and courage, rushing on like fierce, but divided torrents, were opposed the strength, the confidence, the resources, of unity, discipline, reliance upon their leader; like the less turbulent, but more irresistible flow of one majestic river. Against the wild love of military glory were opposed the hatred of oppression, the love for country and home: against contempt of death in the cause of

honour, were opposed a resolve to die for their freedom and their religion.

In all the fervour of his youthful enthusiasm, Alfred mingled in, and directed the battle. The energy of soul subdued the pains of the body,—the weak clay was uplifted on the spirit's wings. Calm, resolved, active,—quick to perceive advantage,—firm to endure reverse,—courageous to strike the blow,—always cool, yet always energetic,—he inspired in his soldiers confidence, and fortitude, and courage, which supported them through a long day against the terrible warriors before whom, individually, they must speedily have perished.

But the day was now far advanced, and the battle was yet doubtful. On the left, Oddune the Earl of Devon, and, in the centre, Alfred himself, with Theodric Earl of Berks, stood in firm opposition to the tiger-like foe,—but on the right, the troops of Ethelbert Earl of Somerset, and those of Egbert Earl of Wilts, began to give way before the impetuous Godrun, and a choice body of his captains. Cynegils, but lately recovered from the wound inflicted by the Sea-king

Sidroc, had been slain, fighting beside his father, and the enraged and sorrowing Egbert himself had perished in seeking vengeance upon the slayer. Loud were the shouts of the victorious Northmen,—and the Saxons, men and captains, were at length retiring in dismay and confusion that threatened a general rout. Alfred, quick to see, and energetic to repair the disaster, was hasting with a small body to turn the tide of flight,—but he was yet distant, and the routed host, like storm-driven clouds with the noise of thunder behind them, were coming on,—when a single warrior, on a black steed embossed with foam, rode up,—leaped to the ground,—snatched a banner from one who fled,—and, with tremendous and reiterated shouts, bade them turn again to victory. His voice, his look, shot fire into the hearts of the desponding Saxons. Following upon his track, like boats in the wake of some proud ship that has broken the billows before them, they pierced the thick mass of their astonished enemies, and, with exulting shouts, renewed the battle. The unknown warrior was tall, and clothed in complete armour: his face was thin,

and deathy pale: his eyes were like burning lamps. Alfred beheld his course, and, pointing to him, cried aloud,* "Behold! behold! a miracle! a miracle! Saint Neot from the grave is risen to lead us on to victory. Now Saxons! now! for the cause of Christ and your country! St Neot! St Neot! to the charge!"

The name was caught up with fervour, and shouted from one end of the host to the other. The moment was decisive: the energy of the new assailants became irresistible. The Northmen gave way,—again struggled for the victory,—but at length were driven to headlong and ruinous flight. Till the sun had set, and darkness was closing in, the slaughter and pursuit continued. Alfred then, undisputed master of

* "Seeing a standard-bearer leading on one of his divisions with great bravery, Alfred is represented to have pointed him out to his warriors as St Neot himself at their head.* The belief increased their enthusiasm; their resolute attack was everywhere irresistible; and the Northmen gave way."—Turner's Anglo-Saxon History.

* MSS. Claud. page 159.

the field, bade sound the trumpet of recall, and the battle ceased.

Themselves in total disorder now from the eagerness of pursuit, groupe by groupe the Saxons returned, and gathered around the standard of their monarch. But the unknown warrior was no where to be found: and the belief spread and strengthened that their arms had indeed been aided by supernatural might. A hasty council was called: it was determined to pass the night in the abandoned camp of the enemy; and on the morrow to pursue them to the fortified hill where they had taken refuge.

The unknown warrior, meantime, who, at such a critical moment, had changed flight into victory, was returning from the pursuit, which he had followed up after the trumpet signal had recalled less ardent soldiers to repose. He walked slowly and alone through the dusky twilight; and his spirit was solemn as the hour. The quick tread of the fugitives was fast dying away behind him; and the cheerful voices of the victors rose louder as he advanced: yet it was not his intention to seek their camp that night, and he knew not

where he should repose his now wearied limbs. The ardour of the battle had subsided within him, and many a corpse that strewed his path drew from him a melancholy sigh.

"Frail vessels of earth that we are!" said he, musing aloud,—"how poor is the conqueror's pride! how little recks it whether we sleep this cold sleep upon the ground, or sit in foolish glory at the short-lived banquet after victory! The mighty warrior of to-day may to-morrow perish from a full meal, or a damp doublet! and how much happier then, or more glorious, will he be than the fellow clay upon which he has but now trodden in the pride of conquest!"

As he ended these words, he looked up, and beheld a tall dark figure advancing towards him. They passed each other at the distance of a few feet,—looked each at the scarcely discernible face of the other,—spake no word,—and walked on. But, at the same moment, both looked back,—paused,—advanced a step,—and again stood still.

"Earl Sidroc?"—said the Saxon warrior, in a tone of doubtful inquiry.

"Thunder of heaven!" replied the other, in

the deep well-known voice of the Sea-king, "Sir Edmund, can this be you?"

In an instant they rushed together, and exchanged the embrace of friends who expected never more to meet.

"They told me you had perished, my generous deliverer," said the Northman, "and I am here to avenge your wrong."

"Have you not then been in the battle?" said Edmund.

"I came too late," was the reply: "The day was far gone when news reached me, some twenty miles on my homeward way, that a Saxon army, numerous and strong, had assaulted the camp of Godrun. I could not hear of that, and hold on my journey in quiet. I hastened back to the camp where I this morning left them,—but they are gone,—and the Saxon hath triumphed."

"A bloody harvest hath indeed been this day gathered, Earl Sidroc! Well for all that your sickle hath not been among the wheat!"

"The garner of death would have been the fuller, Sir Edmund! Many that now wag their

heads in the breeze of triumph might have been trodden in the mire! But I know not:——better perchance that I was not with the husbandmen. Sick am I of the horrid labour, and the day of rest for all might have been the farther removed. But the hour forbids us more of this. Yet have strange thoughts been rising within me since the eve of our parting: and fain would I hold farther converse with you. When and where shall we again meet?"

"Perhaps never more, Earl Sidroc! I shall to-morrow appear before the king; and my doom will be pronounced. If it be well with me, I shall know where to hear of you: if the vengeance of my enemies prevail with the king against me,—then may this meeting be our last. Yet my hope is for the better. They who wrongly judged me cannot for ever remain in darkness; and the king will not shut his ear against the truth. If, as a Saxon, I have erred, as a man, I have gone aright: and whether I live, or whether I die, to the last moment will my conscience acquit me of wrong in that which I did for the

cause of an injured enemy, to whom I owed so much."

"A dotard, or a wretch contemptible, must that king be," exclaimed Sidroc with deep indignation, "who finds in your act aught but what is noble, and to be praised! Such a king is *not* Alfred. But, if you doubt the event, Sir Edmund, my ships lie within a day's journey,—will you cross the ocean with me?—will you——"

"No, Earl Sidroc,—I abide the event. But, ere we part, tell me I pray you, how, and wherefore you are here. I beheld your barks at sea, and your purpose was to Sweden: but the hour was when even I would have called you to return."

"And therefore came I," replied Sidroc, in a deep stern tone. "The winds for four days baffled my course to Wales. The queen then fell sick; and for seven weeks I tarried with her. In the eighth a ship came, and brought tidings of that which had been done: and on that same night I spread my canvass, and flew to take vengeance. Heldor was yester eve at the feast: he is now himself a banquet for the worms. I

slew him in the midst of his warriors, and not a voice bade me hold my hand."

"Richly was the punishment merited!" said the Saxon. "In his hour of insolence I bade him beware. I told him that the murder of that aged man would ere long be visited upon himself."

"The deed was black as hell," returned the Sea-king, "yet not for that was *my* vengeance inflicted. I had sheathed my sword, and hoped never to draw it more: in your quarrel alone hath it left the scabbard."

"I must thank you, noble Sidroc," said Edmund, grasping the hand of the Northman,—"warmly thank you, for the intent was generous, and the chastisement was deserved: yet almost would I wish that, for my wrongs, which are now healed, the vengeance had not fallen. He is gone to a fearful account, with all his sins upon his head! and for me————"

"Demon!" exclaimed Sidroc with fierce energy,—"let him reap as he hath sown! The serpents of Nastrond have no sting too burning to

purge away his crime. Let his name be spoken no more betwixt us."

"But he fell by the open stroke?" said Edmund, in a dubious tone of inquiry;—"you slew him not unprepared?"

"Flames of Surtur!" cried the Sea-king,—"of whom ask you this? Is it of Sidroc that you demand if his enemy fell by the open stroke?"

"Be not incensed, Earl Sidroc," replied Edmund; "I doubt not your honour,—but the crime had been one of treachery—your mood is fierce and vindictive——"

"Fierce as you will, Sir Edmund,—and vindictive,"—cried the Sea-king, interrupting him, "but—thunder of God! slay a man at advantage?—Heldor was newly at the feast,—cool and strong,—his warriors around him,—his armour on,—his sword at his thigh:—I entered his tent,—proclaimed him *nithing*,—and bade him come forth, or perish where he sat. The colour fled from his cheek,—but he started up, and followed me with his guests to the open space. In the hearing of all I flung dastard in his teeth,—and told him that the arm of the mur-

dered Saxon guided my sword to vengeance. Ere the signal had been given, he hurled his lance at my face: I avoided the blow,—and in the next moment clove him to the neck. To the tent of Godrun then I went, and told aloud that which I had done. All is now known to you, —tell me then,—is there in this aught that may be questioned?"

"Forgive me, Earl Sidroc,"—replied the youth,—"I misdoubted in nought your honour, —but I feared for your fury. Yet one thing more;—the Sea-king Rhinulph who so generously delivered me———"

"I crossed his ships at sea,"—replied Sidroc: "his wound is healed: he returns to his country."

"The blessing of heaven go with him!" said Edmund. "But now, Earl Sidroc,—whither speed *you?* and what will be your counsel to the king Godrun, and your captains?"

"I cannot answer you to that, Sir Edmund. What hath been the loss in this day's fight,— greater or less, to you or to ourselves,—I know not. I follow now to join my countrymen; and

in the council I shall hear what hath chanced. If yet in strength, the cry will still be 'war,' and my voice may be unregarded; if their might is indeed shorn, then will the word be for peace, and to that, on terms of honour, my counsel will lean. On the morrow I may better answer you. Till then farewell. Time urges, and I must not linger."

Edmund returned his cordial grasp, bade him the good night, and the friendly enemies parted.

Wearied with a day of toil, and not yet recovered from long sickness, Edmund walked slowly forward, hungered and faint, yet unknowing where to seek food and repose. To the camp he chose not that night to repair, because he would not, in an hour of fatigue and anxious cares, seek audience of the king, nor trust his own cause to himself, thus spiritless and exhausted. Leaving then the noisy camp to the left, he took his way over the wide down in search of some house where, unknown, he might procure food, and shelter for the night. He had not proceeded far when a light, as from a smith's

forge, appeared at some short distance before him; and thither he resolved to hasten. The stroke of hammer, and the continuous roar of the bellows, quickly met his ear; and the voice of a man singing at his labour. The interior of the smith's shop soon shone brightly before him, like a patch of sunshine amid utter darkness. Spear heads, swords, and armour, flashed to the blaze; —from the smitten anvil rose the sparks in showers;—bared arms, and faces grimed, and bodies clad in shining leather, moved to and fro, like figures cut out of fire: all was activity, and cheerful labour. He drew nearer,—the song was well known to him; and the voice had, as he thought, before met his ear. But he saw not from whom it came, unless from a boy who worked at the bellows, and whose back was toward him; nor had he recollection of any face among them. He entered therefore without hesitation; and demanded if there were at hand any place where, for money or for Christian kindness, he could receive food and shelter. The din of forge and hammers was so loud that his question reached only the ear of the man to

whom he addressed himself, and who instantly replied;

"The camp, Sir Thane, is not two miles off; —and there, doubtless, you may have fitting welcome. A main hard-fighting has there been to-day, and these arms must be done for the morning. A grand victory, Sir Thane, has it been for us: pity 'tis you come a day behind the market. But I can't talk: you'll see the hill eastward yonder,—and the moon must be getting up; I can't on no account whatsomever spare man or lad to go with you,—but you couldn't miss it if you would. No—there's *no* place nigh here where you can find what would suit the like of you: poor handicrafts men such as we be,—nought else. Bring the silver-laid cuishes this way Kenric: and take tent Radiger that those rivets are well closed. Blood of my father! but that corslet burst open like a cockle shell."

At this moment the roar of the bellows ceased; and Edmund was about to make explanation to the hasty vulcan, when a loud and angry exclamation, from the man whose work was

delayed by the suspension of the forge-blast, called his attention; and he beheld the small figure of the execrated blower, standing stiff with terror,—eyes fixed, and mouth agape,—staring upon himself. The face, where not grimed with soot, was deadly pale: the small hairy cap on the crown of his head seemed as if lifted up by his erected hair. He neither moved nor spoke,—but looked with bursting eyeballs upon the warrior, as if he beheld an apparition.

"I' the name of Zernebock!" cried the first-mentioned vulcan, "what dost thee glower at i' that fashion Coifi? Hast never seen a man in armour afore? What dost thee wag thy jaw for i' that gate like a salt-box stiff i' the hinge?"

By this time three or four men had suspended their work to look at the mazed little smith, who, unable to do more than half close, and then open again his capacious mouth, in abortive attempts at speech, afforded them matter for a hearty laugh. Edmund knew not what to think. The face of the small figure was that of a man unknown to him; yet seemed to regard him with the extremity of horror. Almost as ghast-

ly himself from long sickness and fatigue, he stood silently gazing upon the fear-stricken countenance; and the beholders at length began to feel the contagion of so speaking a terror. One of the smiths at length, however, advancing behind him, bestowed upon the little man a rousing slap upon the shoulder, accompanied by a loud laugh, with the intention to stir him from his waking night-mare. But the effect was not such as the striker had expected. Uttering a faint, tremulous cry, the terrified man shuddered, —relaxed his stiffened limbs,—closed his eyes, —and sank as if lifeless upon the ground. The features, that had been so distorted by fear, recovered now somewhat of their habitual character; and Edmund instantly knew them for those of the good brother Elf. Pushing aside the rough smiths who had crowded round the fallen man, he raised him in his arms, and bore him to the air. The fresh breeze, and a few drops of cold water upon his face, soon restored him; and Edmund, guessing now the cause of his affright, endeavoured with soft, and yet cheerful words, to pacify and embolden him. His attempt was

not unsuccessful. Guided by the master smith, he carried his little burthen into the house, where the light of a turf fire, and of a lamp fed with melted fat, showed to the unclosing eyes of the poor brother that it was no ghost who held him upon his knee, and talked to him as to a frighted child, but his beloved protector himself, in real flesh and blood, only pale and thin as from long sickness.

"Oh Christ! oh Christ!" he ejaculated in a faint voice, as he began to unclose his eyes;—"Oh the virgin! Oh blessed St Winebald! Oh St Ethelwerd! St Edilwald! and St Cuthwin! And is it you yourself Sir Edmund—are you sure it is you?"

"Hush!" said the youth, glancing his eye around the small room, "speak not my name, on your life! Yes, my good brother, 'tis I myself, rest assured,—and neither ghost nor demon."

"But did they not kill you then?" whispered Elf, with wide eyes; "Oh Christ! they told me you had been cut to pieces by those horrid Northmen!"

"Hush, hush," repeated Edmund, placing

the little monk upon his feet, as he perceived an inner door opening,—" not a word ! I am here, and alive, as you see. You shall hear all at fitting time. Ask no questions now ; and speak not my name : I must remain unknown till the morrow."

" And I also must remain unknown," said Elf, —" and speak not you *my* name, Sir Knight,— or call me Coifi, after my blessed father in Heaven : for brother Elf is a lost man, or rather he is now a smith's man, and his name, as I said, is Coifi. Oh Sir Edmund,—that is, Sir Knight, —I have strange things to tell : but bless me ! there is supper on the table, and this fright hath caused a singular craving at my stomach."

At this moment the half-opened door was thrust wide ; and a woman, bearing on a wooden trencher some massive slices of dark-coloured bread, entered. She stared, and courtesied to the warrior,—then placed her trencher upon the rough table, beside a huge piece of cold meat, flanked by an ample earthen jug that wore a crown of creamy foam. Edmund stated his request for food and a night's repose ; but the thin-featured

dame seemed to hesitate. Her husband, who had left the room immediately after ushering in the warrior and his sooty burthen, entered as she was about to speak; and, in answer to her appeal to him, declared that the knight "could i' no fashion be put up sortably with the like o' them: sorry was he; but welcome should he be to a share of the supper, and a draught at the ale-jug: —and neighbour Rainer, the shepherd, not a stone's throw off, would lodge him sweeter and quieter than they, whose beds were none of the cleanest, by reason that the smith's trade was not all so fair to the hand,—not to speak of his being dinned all night wi' the strokes of the hammer, which——"

The smith was proceeding, when Edmund, whose opinion of the value of cleanliness and quiet perfectly accorded with that of the rough vulcan, interrupted him, and begged to be conducted to the abode of the said shepherd Rainer. Elf offered his services as guide, and they left the noisy hovel together.

They found the honest shepherd and his wife just sitting down to a smoking supper, and re-

ceived from them a hearty welcome. Elf did not consider his black habiliments and sooty countenance any impediment to his forming one of the party on so momentous an occasion, and therefore sat down seriously to work. He had performed wonders, and was still exciting the surprise of his entertainers, when a peremptory summons came from the smith, whose bellows demanded the hand of the truant blower.

"I am but taking a mouthful with the stranger knight, and shall be with you in a thought," was the reply. Still he lingered over his pleasant work, and another, and angry, call was heard.

"Gadzooks! Coifi man!" cried the smith himself, bursting in, "what means this? and more work to be done by morning than we can get through. I'll tell you what it is, my master,—if you're not at the bellows before I can whistle Cissa Sabert, may the fiend stiffen my arm if I don't——"

"I shall myself want the services of Coifi to-night," said Edmund, "and will pay you for——"

"No, no," cried Elf, "go your ways Master

Swithred,—I'll be after you, and that before you can whistle Cissa Sabert half through man."

The smith grumbled, and withdrew.

"There will be no peace for either you or I, Sir Knight," said the brother, "if I tarry here: but Swithred may whistle his breath out if he whistles till——And yet I wish I could have heard your adventures, and told you mine in return: but the fiend fly away with me,—that is, I mean, Christ be good unto me,—if I don't work at another bellows 'twixt this and to-morrow's noon. The good night to you sir—sir—I forget your name,—the good night to you neighbour Rainer,—the good night to you dame Tata."

He armed himself with huge portions of bread and goat's flesh as he made his adieus, and then vanished from the house. Edmund scarcely comprehended the meaning of his hurried words, pronounced with a full mouth, in the brief intervals of active mastication, but lifted his finger,—uttered the single word "remember," and bade him good night.

Almost immediately after, the door again flew

open; and the smith, provided with a stout hazle wand, entered, and demanded the recusant blower.

"Coifi hath just gone, neighbour Swithred," said the shepherd; and the pacified man of iron disappeared. But there was soon another visit. "The little gobble-all," said the furious smith, "hath not been at the forge: what ha' you done wi' him? or hath Zernebock flown off wi' him bodily over the downs?"

He was assured by all that Coifi had departed; and went home to digest his wrath as he could. Certain it is that the bellows had never from that time the help of brother Elf: and two days elapsed before Edmund heard tidings of him. The disappearance of the monk,—whose restless tongue would, he feared, betray the secret of his abode to some in the camp,—caused him uneasiness: but he soon retired to rest, in a bed fragrant of wild thyme and rosemary; and, after putting up his prayers for the night, and listening awhile to the soft roar of the forge, and the tinkling of the anvil and hammer, fell into a sound sleep, from which he did not awake till the sun was high in the heavens.

CHAPTER XII.

After partaking of a hearty breakfast, and rewarding his host with a *scyllinga*, or twelve silver pennies, a bounteous donation at a period when thirty pence was the price of an ox,* Ed-

* "The Saxon money was sometimes reckoned by pennies, as the French money is now by livres. Thus, in one charta, three plough-lands are conveyed for three thousand pennies. In another, eighty acres were bought for three hundred and eighty-five pennies. In another, one thousand four hundred and fifty pennies occur.*

The name for money, which is oftenest met with in the charters, is the Mancus. Of this kind of money we have one curious passage of Elfric: he says, five pennies make one shilling, and thirty pennies one mancus.† This would make the mancus six shillings. The passage in the laws of Henry the First intimates the same.‡

* Astle's MS. Chart. Nos. 7, 22, 28.

† Hickes, Diss. Ep. 109, and Wan. Cat. MS. 113.

‡ Debent reddi secundum legem triginta solidi ad Manbotam, id est, hodie 5 mancæ. Wilk. p. 265, So. p. 249.

mund bade his astonished entertainers adieu, and set forth on his way toward the camp. His strength was much recruited by long and sound sleep, and his spirits seemed now more equal than on the preceding day to the trying business on which he was about to enter. He had to appear before a monarch whose judgment might have been blinded, and whose heart might have been estranged from him, by wrongly understood facts, by false reports, and by malicious insinuations: yet in that monarch rested all that he could have of hope. He had also, as he thought, to confront proud, bitter, and revengeful enemies, who, by every sacrifice of truth, would seek to accomplish his downfall. Even to himself he acknowledged that suspicion might, without injustice, fix upon him. He had aided the

Two passages in the Anglo-Saxon laws seem to confirm Elfric's account of the mancus being thirty pennies; for an ox is valued at a mancus in one, and at thirty pence in another."*—Turner's Anglo-Saxon History, vol. ii. p. 602.

* Wilk. p. 66 and 126. Yet this passage is not decisive, because the other accompanying valuations do not correspond.

escape of a captured foe,—he had witnessed, without opposing it, the death of a Saxon noble by the hand of that enemy,—he had even, in the cause of an invader, drawn his sword against his countrymen. That he had done all this, he could not, and would not deny: and the penalty of the rigid law must be death. In his justification what had he to plead?—*Gratitude*,—which, toward a foe of his country, men might say it was a crime in him to feel,—a treason to shape into act: *A sense of wrong done to that foe,—to himself, as pledged to other issues,—and a burning desire to redress it*,—Might they not insist that this was but arrogance in his own judgment, and rebellion against the authority of his superiors? *Admiration for a noble enemy, pity for his beautiful and gentle queen and daughter*,—The plea might be answered with scoffs, or rebutted with a charge of falsehood. But Alfred, he still hoped, would patiently listen,—would believe his words,—would understand, and sympathize with, his motives. Here alone was his trust fixed. Yet—whatever might be the result—he could pursue but one plain open course. He could not seek safety in

concealment,—he could not purchase forgiveness by acknowledgment of guilt. He must avow his deeds, and his motives, and firmly abide the event. To One, at least, his thoughts had been known,—and by Him would they be mercifully and rightly judged.

Such were the workings of his mind as he took his way toward the camp: but the hour of his trial was yet a little while deferred. The king, with his army, had quitted their posts at earliest dawn, and marched to invest the fortified hill to which the Northmen had fled. The distance was some eight miles farther,—he had no chance of recovering the horse which he had abandoned on the field,—and nothing therefore remained for him but to subdue his impatience, and make what speed he could on foot.

The Saxon army, meantime, had surrounded the intrenched camp of the Northmen, and summoned them to submit; but the demand was answered with contemptuous refusal. To assault a fortified position was seldom part of the tactics of that age and the alternative was, to shut up the refractory enemy till hunger should

compel him to submit. The Saxon soldiers, accordingly, aided by crowds of willing peasants, were laboriously employed in pitching tents, and in sinking a deep ditch at the foot of the hill, to prevent any attempt at sudden escape. Alfred, meantime, after having given directions for the work, and attended upon the performance of mass in a spacious and rich pavilion which, on the day previous, had witnessed the banquet of King Godrun, was seated with his nobles and friends in council, when it was whispered among them that the unknown warrior, whose presence had turned the fate of the battle, was seen approaching the tent. A superstitious fear crept upon many, for the belief was general that the powerful succour had been given by no earthly arm. The whisper had just reached the king, when a captain on guard entered to say that the stranger stood at the door, and craved audience.

"Admit him instantly," said the monarch, and rose to do honour to so distinguished a visitor. There was a dead silence as Edmund entered: every eye was fixed upon him; and many

a heart beat quick at the first glance of his pallid countenance. He bowed low to the king, whom he instantly recognized, though in a garb how different from that of the peasant!—shot his lamp-like eye around, and seemed as if awaiting to be first addressed.

Alfred gazed on him with speechless surprise,—took a hurried step forward,—paused,—again stepped on, with agitated step,—partly extended his arms—yet still seemed uncertain if to advance or to speak. The nobles who beheld this strange emotion of the king, drew back; and there was a silence of many seconds, broken at length by the voice of Edmund.

"I am come before you, my king"—he said: but in that moment Alfred rushed toward him, and clasped him in his arms. "'Tis he himself!" he cried—"my noble youth! my——"

"Good God!" was the exclamation of several voices; "'tis the lost Sir Edmund!"

There was a general rush toward the astonished youth: his hands, his arms, were grasped: his name was spoken in the accents of affection and esteem.

"My beloved boy!" was the exclamation of Leofric, as he almost forced him from the arms of the king:

"My generous, my noble, my injured preserver!" burst from the lips of Sigifred, whose dark eyes shot now no longer the proud glance of contempt, but glistened with tears of gratitude and brotherly love.

"Ah! my noble young champion!"—said the Earl Oddune, snatching his hand, "I know you better now: you must forgive,—you must forgive the hot old soldier who wronged you in his hasty thought. Beard of St Peter! but I ought to have known better of him that perilled himself so deeply even for an enemy that had done him the good turn!"

Theodric next folded the youth in his arms: "I little thought," said he, "when I brought the little frightened wood-pigeon from his nest in the oak tree, that he would turn out an eagle to strike the raven of the North."

Many others, who had been known to Edmund at Maximus Castle, or elsewhere, pressed round him with gratulations; and his answers

to all, when his tongue found release from the fetters of surprise and delight that at first held him dumb, were such as might be expected from his enthusiastic and generous heart. One noble, however, still kept himself reserved. Leaning upon his sheathed sword, the haughty Earl of Somerset, clad in splendid armour, stood with eyes fixed upon Edmund, but neither moved, nor spake. It was not dislike, or envy, that his look expressed, but haughtiness that could not stoop to make a first advance to one whom he had wronged, even though he had received from that one the most important, and subduing of benefits. His only son had been rescued from death, —but it was by a man whom he had insulted, and injured: even to such his pride could not bend, although the *father* was stirring at his heart. Edmund marked him, and was himself the first to advance.

"Hath not the Earl Ethelbert yet forgiven me?" he said, extending his hand. The proud noble moved one step toward him, and accepted the proffered grasp.

"The Earl Ethelbert," he replied, "hath

thanks to offer to the preserver of his son: but sees in him the obscure stranger who presumed to the hand of his daughter. If gratitude then be chilled by resentment,———"

"My Lord of Somerset," said the king, advancing with a smile upon his face, and speaking in a tone of good humour tempered by dignity,—"We must not permit you one word upon this. You will be pleased to understand that in this matter I also am a party, and that not the least concerned. We have had somewhat to forgive, my lord; and may hope for some consideration in return. The lady Elfrida,—pardon me Earl Ethelbert, for I speak on authority,—will accept the hand of the obscure stranger; and the Earl of Somerset himself will not, I believe, disdain alliance with the future Earl of Wilts. Yet I have now spoken unguardedly to one whom death hath so newly deprived of friends, and hoped-for allies. Forgive me, my lord; but that noble house is gone, —may God have accepted their spirits!—and in the vacant honours, if life be spared me, shall this noble youth be invested."

The words, though spoken in a low tone, were distinctly understood by all; and a murmur of applause arose. Edmund knelt, and impressed a fervent kiss upon the hand of his generous king and friend; while his pallid countenance was suffused with a slight glow, like a white flower reddening in a sun tint. The eye of Ethelbert gleamed with satisfaction: he again extended his hand, and with a warmer grasp returned the eager pressure of the delighted youth. Sigifred started forward.

"My noble Edmund!" he whispered, after drawing him aside,—"let me already call you brother! Alas! poor Elfrida! who knew your worth so well, when all other eyes saw but the tarnish that concealed the gold,—what a burst of happiness is there to come upon thee! She is now but the shadow of her former self, my beloved Edmund. We have all been cruelly wrong: and poor Ethelburga too! her eyes have been like fountains of tears: Elfrida's have been at the heart! But this must not come suddenly upon her. Good God! if any hasty tongue ——I must myself be the bearer of the tidings

—yet no, my face will tell all too soon—I will write, and say there are rumours of your escape, —but that we have yet small belief of their truth.—The messenger shall know nothing—he shall be immediately despatched—To-morrow I will send again—and tell of better hopes—On the third day she shall know the truth—On the fourth, if we may have leave to depart, we will hasten together to the castle—But you must not at first appear—I will say that on the next day you will be with us—I will have your grey steed led out before her, as if to await you on the road—Oh! Sir Edmund, it hath been a sad pleasure to poor Elfrida to fondle the noble horse, and talk to him of his lost master! She hath never permitted any man to mount him, since I brought him home from Kenwith. I found the gallant creature stabled with my own, near the house of my guide. Poor fellow! he knew my voice, and seemed as if dumbly inquiring after his kind rider. But he shall be richly caparisoned, as if to bear you on the morrow—I will then say, 'Elfrida, he will to-night be here'

—Your voice shall be first heard from some distant chamber, or in the eastern portico———"

"You talk too loud in your dreams, my young friend," said Alfred, laying his hand gently upon the shoulder of the startled enthusiast, whose voice had insensibly become elevated as he proceeded in his pleasant vision,—"and Sir Edmund will tell you that I have once already met rebuke for overhearing the exclamations of a fond dreamer."

Sigifred appeared confused, and made no reply; but Edmund, bowing low, made answer, "Your forgiveness, my liege, so speedily followed the offence that I do not again ask pardon. But your captain of the guard awaits your majesty's pleasure."

He again bowed, and was retiring, when the king detained him, "I have no secrets from *you*, my young friend, and may perhaps need your counsel,—unless, truly, your companion of the ebon locks may have some other dream to tell, more pleasant to a lover's ear than the dull realities of camp affairs."

"No dream," replied Edmund with a bow,

" can be more pleasant to me than the reality of your Majesty's confidence."

Both looked round; but Sigifred had left the pavilion; and Edmund rightly guessed that he had gone to expedite the message to Elfrida.

The business of the captain of the guard was merely to report that a Danish warrior craved a free passage from the hill, and permission to communicate with the king.

" Let him be honourably conducted hither," was the reply of the monarch; " and we trust that his errand may be of peace."

At this moment Leofric, who had been some short time absent from the pavilion, entered hastily; bowed to the king, and laid hands upon Edmund.

" By your permission my liege," he said, " I must carry off the lost sheep for a short time: there are some five score fellows at hand, clamorous as kenneled hounds, to have sight of their new-found old young master, as they call him."

" You have the best right, my honest thane, to command the services of your son," was the

answer of the king: and Leofric instantly dragged out his prisoner, whose look expressed somewhat like shame for the rough kindness of the straight-forward old man. Alfred smiled at him, as he saw the uneasy expression of his face, and immediately advanced toward Theodric and Ethelbert, who stood in talk together.

Edmund had not gone far from the pavilion,—his right arm firmly locked in the left of the eager, and wide-striding thane,—when the shouts of a body of men, whom he instantly knew as the followers of Leofric, hailed him.

"Long live the valiant Sir Edmund!" was the reiterated cry, as they advanced. The quick walk, at which they were first approaching, was soon changed to an eager race; and the old thane was in some danger of being run down by his joyous vassals. All struggled to seize the hands of the youth: every one greeted, and was greeted in return, with words and looks of kindness; till Leofric reminded them that "Sir Edmund would last longer than a snow in June,—and they had work in hand that would not do

itself." Again went up shouts of gladness, and the parties separated.

"It seems to me, my kind father," said Edmund, as they began, at a slower pace, to return toward the royal tent, "as if I were in some delightful dream; and I almost fear to awaken, and find all the bright pageant gone."

"Tush! tush boy!—" replied the thane, giving him a shake by the arm,—"you're wake enough, never fear; and we are awake too, and that's more than some of us could say but a little while back."

"I came here," continued Edmund, "like one charged with heavy crimes, and doubtful how he should prove his innocence before angry judges,—but I have been received like a friend restored from the grave, or like a hero returning from victory."

"And a hero you are, my brave boy," responded the rough thane, "and a friend, as you say, risen from the dead. But we must talk over these matters at another time."

"Yet let me ask you, my generous father,—"

"You are going to enquire about Oswulf,"

replied the thane; "but spare me that subject. Enough that I know now all the truth. God of my fathers! that such a wretch ———But I must not speak of this—Your innocence, my brave and noble boy, is clearer than daylight—let that content you. You have not forgotten a fellow that warned you from behind the hedge:—his conscience pricked him then,—yet in the next moment he joined with those that lay in wait for you. But, when all men's tongues were praising your deeds, and lamenting your death,—then, neither day nor night could he rest: men said he was bewitched: but, howsoever, sickness came on him, and he thought death was at his door: so he confessed to the priest, and sent for me to make a clean breast before he went to his reckoning. He named the others that had been with him in that black job,—and we had the truth out of them. You must forgive me, my boy: I could not see through lies that might have blinded an angel: and I loved you at my heart, more than I'll say to you, even while I cast you away from me. And poor Ethelburga,—she has well nigh broke

her heart about you: and Kentwina, so soon as every body knew the rights o' th' matter, she forsooth must be dinning my ears from morning to night about her poor injured boy, as if she had not been just as blinded as the rest of us. And I have heard something about another black business of Oswulf's,—that morning when you quarrelled, and he had his arm broken."

"The Prior Edelhun has done wrong to make that known to you," said Edmund.

"Why man, how could he help it? We all thought you dead; and he could not rest till he had done you justice. You should have told *me* your story, my boy,—and then other luck would have followed. But, in the devil's name, what is become of that whirligig Elf, that you carried off out of the splitstick? The fiend must have been in him sure. He helped you to your horses when you conjured the Sea-king out of the dungeon: but you did not know, may be, that the bit of imp's flesh had stolen the cattle from Earl Oddune."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Edmund, with surprise and indignation.

"Impossible or not," returned Leofric, "'twas even so: and a towering fury was the old Earl thrown into when he found the trick that had been put upon him. But we must talk over these matters at another time; for the Northman, I see, is advancing, and we must be present when the king receives him. But that fellow was not in the battle methinks, or I must have seen him. Blood of the martyrs! he comes down the hill like a black cloud in December!"

"'Tis the Sea-king Sidroc," exclaimed Edmund; "If he be the ambassador of the Northmen, we may hope for peace; or, at the least, for fair dealing: if on his own prompting only he be come, then with me will be chiefly his errand. I must give him the meeting, and accompany him to the king. Pardon me, Sir Leofric, that I quit you abruptly: it may be of moment that I have speech with him before he enters the presence."

"Body o' me!"—said the thane, as he watched the steps of Edmund toward the Sea-king, "if the lad is not shot up to full grown man on

our hands, almost in the drinking of a hornful! To think of him now, that but t'other day was poking over his book with father Cynewulf, like a very monk,—and hanging back when any sort of mannish sport was in hand, as if he were afraid to cross horse, or handle spear against any thing whatsoever with four legs, and teeth in its head,—and now—Christ save us! who but he for cleaving of shields—and taking of banners—and turning of battles, and all the rest of it!—My salvation! but this work makes old fellows of some of us! There he is—palm to palm with yon thunder and lightning Northman, as if he were the oldest warrior in the land,—and a prince to boot. So, so—arm in arm—Very well, young Sampson,—My certy! but you make a pretty couple. Heaven help any four that should have to come across you! But I'll away to the presence before you, and see how you play your game there. Bones of my father! what will Ethy and Kentwina say when they hear of all this?"

So saying, the stout old thane strode away;

and soon disappeared within the door of the pavilion.

The king and his nobles were awaiting the Danish ambassador; and Sidroc, at length, accompanied by Edmund, entered the pavilion. The Northman cast a proud glance upon the assembly,—bowed slightly, yet with a look of respect, to the king,—and was about to declare his message without farther ceremony, when Edmund, taking his hand, prevented his intention by himself speaking the first.

"I present to your majesty," said he, after an obeisance of profound respect, "the noble Sea-king to whom I owe so much, and whose good deeds are already known to you. May he bring the words of peace!"

Alfred arose from the rich couch on which he was seated, and extended his hand to the Northman.

"Earl Sidroc," he said, with a look and tone of respect and kindness, "your name, for evil and for good, hath been heard far and wide, throughout this land. But that which is of evil have you shared with thousands of your country-

men, whom God hath for a time permitted to scourge us,—that which is of good hath been of yourself alone. May the evil wither utterly,—the good strike root and flourish! Speak now the words that you have to tell: and the God of all people grant that they may be the words of peace!"

"King of Wessex,"—replied the Northman, with dignified tone and demeanour, "If the name of Sidroc hath been heard where the buckler rang to the sword-stroke, let it be remembered that he is one of a nation whose religion is war: that he came for vengeance on a deed of shame and cruelty, committed on a warrior illustrious throughout the North,—on one whose renown had mingled in the dreams of his infancy, and inflamed the ambition of his youth. The king of Wessex himself, so nurtured, might have as fiercely emulated the glory of the conqueror. If other feelings have since stirred in me, it hath been that years and sad experience have better taught me. If I have sometimes sought to avoid evil, it hath been that I have had other thoughts of what is good. I have seen that the

glory of war is not happiness;—I have learned that one act of human kindness lives in the heart after the trumpet blast of victory hath been long forgotten on the ear. King of Wessex,—from this noble youth I have learned, that I may love even an enemy, and hate him that calls himself my friend. I have learned to doubt if *he* be the true God who commands us to live only to inflict, and to endure, misery. And for this must I meet the contempt and hatred of my countrymen. I had sheathed my sword, as I hoped, for ever. I had left your shores, and vowed to end life in peace: but vengeance for a deed of infamy recalled me. I believed that my generous foe had fallen beneath the dastardly hand of one who had been my comrade in battle;—I returned, and inflicted the punishment. Again I hasted toward my ships; for my word had been passed that I would never more draw sword on the Saxon. You demand then of me wherefore I am now again in arms. But I have not yet stood in the battle: and my hope is that the sword may not anew be drawn. My promise bound me not again to give aid to the aggressor,

—but left me full right to repel attack. Had the Northmen warred for conquest, I had now been in my ships, ploughing the waves toward Sweden: but the Saxon drew first the sword; and tidings reached me on my way that the Northmen must fall before them. I hasted back to succour my countrymen,—but the battle was ended ere I arrived. I remain with them now, because they are fallen into adversity,—and because I would aid them to arise. My voice hath been heard among them for peace to this land—but other counsels as yet prevail. If they persist in their folly, I cannot abandon them in their need. I oppose their counsels—but must aid their arms, if an enemy come against them. Their fear is of Saxon treachery. They dread lest, when the words of peace have been exchanged, the sword of their enemy may but take them at the better advantage. Their religion teaches them that death in battle opens to them everlasting happiness in the hall of Odin; but that the end of the coward is eternal wailing in the regions of Niflheim. They will die laughing, with their swords steeped in their own blood,

rather than submit to a treacherous conqueror. Their demand is then, 'will ye retire a two day's march hence, and let them pass free?—so will they quit this kingdom of Wessex, and turn their arms 'gainst Mercia, and the men of Wales. If ye refuse, then to the god of battle they appeal,—and will perish rather, sword in hand, than prostrate themselves to a conqueror.' King of Wessex, I have spoken their words;—how will you make answer to them?"

"Noble Sidroc," replied the king,—"whom I cannot all commend, and will not blame,—for, even as our lights, so will be the things required of us,—to your countrymen this is our answer. If they doubt the Saxon's faith, it is that themselves have been ever false. If they wilfully rush upon fate,—then with them alone rest the guilt, and the punishment! Do they deem the Saxon mad, or blind, that we should fling away the advantage which, by the blessing of Heaven, we have purchased with our blood? Do they hope that, having the lion in our toils, we should let him loose to ravage our flocks? Do they think us so heartless, that,—

when the fire brand is on the earth, and our foot raised to tread it out, we should suffer it to be flung into the granary of our neighbour, so that we ourselves be rid of the flame? If the men of Mercia, and of Wales, call not the king of Wessex *their* king also, do they therefore suffer under evil less than we? Are they not dwellers of the same land? Are they not, many of them, children of the same fathers? But they are, at least, men: they feel the sword and the fire,—they writhe under oppression,—they love their homes, their children, and their religion, even as we do. Why then should we abandon them to miseries which ourselves have found almost unendurable? Earl Sidroc,—our religion is of Christ,—and it teacheth us to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us. Ye may laud your bloody gods,—and heap their altars with the shrieking victims,—and carry sword and fire throughout the earth,—but ye know not religion,—which teacheth justice and mercy,—and your reward will *not* be the eternal happiness ye dream of. To your fatal creed is due the misery wherewith ye have so long afflicted this

earth, on which, though laden with the primeval curse, the All-Merciful hath willed so many blessings. While the god of slaughter is the object of your worship, there will be among you no justice, and no mercy, and no uprightness. The oath cannot bind you, the cry of the distressed cannot move you. We will grant to the Northmen peace,—we will extend to them the hand of brotherhood,—we will share our lands with them,—we will pray to the same God with them. But that God shall not be the grim idol who delights in bloodshed,—and rewards wickedness by an eternal life of debauchery. He whom we will worship with our brother men of the North, must be the One only God, the Almighty, the All-Wise, the All-Merciful. If to the faith and the adoration of this God, and of Christ, the men of the North will turn from their abominations,—then shall the sword be changed into the reaping-hook, and we will live together as one people. But, if ye still remain in your blindness and barbarity, then, to the last man, will we wage war against you; and cease never till ye are extirpated from this land. This to your country-

men. To yourself, Earl Sidroc, I would speak more, and in the language of a friend. The true voice hath been heard in your heart, though your understanding have yet received it not. But this for another hour, and more private occasion. Bear to your countrymen our answer: bid them patiently hear, and well consider it. But come then again unto us,—that the religion whose whispers have stirred thy heart, may be also made plain to thy judgment. Our holy men shall show thee the errors in which thou hast lived; and expound to thee the blessed doctrine of our salvation by Christ. Thy young friend here also will commune with thee, and smooth the ruggedness of the way. Then, if thine eyes shall be opened to the truth, a powerful apostle shalt thou be among thy benighted brethren: and the guilt of thy days of ignorance may be atoned for by the good fruits of thy better knowledge."

The manner of Alfred was firm and dignified, yet gentle; his look beamed benevolence. The stately Sea-king was evidently much moved. After a short silence he made answer.

"Is this then all that ye demand of us? Ye call not on us to surrender our arms? Ye permit us, on this sole condition, to go free? Ye ask us but to believe in, and worship, the God of the Christians, and ye will then give us lands, and regard us as brethren and friends?"

"That ye should believe in, and adore, the true God, and obey His laws," replied the king, "is all that we require of you. Do these things, with sincerity and with truth,—and all other good things will be comprehended in them."

Sidroc remained for a short time silent, as if in doubt; then said, "King of Wessex, you have spoken the words of wisdom, and of kindness. May the end of all be good! and may the true God, whosoever he be, direct you and us aright. Happiness be with you!"

He bowed with dignified respect to the king, and more slightly to the attentive nobles, stooped then his lofty head, and passed from the tent.

Edmund craved permission of the king, and instantly followed him. He found the Sea-king in a mood of great seriousness.

"Sir Edmund," said he, as they walked on together,—"my mind misgives me,—and how, in this matter, rightly to act, I know not. Your monarch is a god, rather than a man like those in yonder camp above us. I would serve my countrymen,—yet I cannot aid them to abuse such magnanimity. They may make pretence to worship your God,—but how shall it be known that their hearts are with their words? May they not bow the knee to the religion forced upon them, and afterwards repay their forgiving enemy with steel and fire? By the thunder of heaven, if I find falsehood in their thoughts, I will have no hand in their hypocrisy! But time must shew. I will sound the depths of their hearts, and give warning if I find there rocks on which the hopes of your noble king must be wrecked. This business frets me: and my cares are also great for the safety of my wife and daughter. The news of this defeat may rouse a thirst for vengeance among the tame slaves of Brightstowe. Our force there is now small,—and a Danish queen may be deemed a proud trophy of their valour."

"Let the queen Aslauga find shelter with the king of Wessex;" said Edmund. "Under his care she will be safe as in the tent of Sidroc, surrounded by armies. I will speak with Alfred; and his mandate for her safe and honourable keeping will be instantly issued. Or I will myself take horse, and escort her hither. What say you Earl Sidroc?"

The Northman stopped, and grasped the hand of the youth. "Let then the word of your king be spoken for her," he said; "and, after a few days, we may perchance again spread our sails. I cannot remain here to draw the sword against your noble monarch: I cannot remain to witness the death-struggles of my countrymen, should they refuse the offered terms,—or see them accept, only to violate them."

"But, if they deal faithfully with us," returned Edmund, "will not Earl Sidroc remain in this land, and be——"

"The future is dark before me," said the Sea-king, interrupting him,—"I can now pledge myself to nothing. Much have I for thought. To renounce the religion of my fathers is a sore

task,—to abide in error is yet a heavier evil. On the morrow I will return to you, and give patient hearing to your instructors. Till then, farewell."

The friends parted. Sidroc, attended by the Danish herald, and a guard of Saxon soldiers, repassed the camp; and Edmund returned in haste to the royal pavilion. The remainder of that day was spent by him in happy discourse among his friends. The story of his adventures was told, and all obscurities and misunderstandings mutually explained. Into these it would be tiresome, and unnecessary to enter. The true motives which ruled the actions of the high-minded youth are already known to the reader; and it can demand no deep ingenuity to understand in what manner they might be made evident to those who had misconceived them.

An evening of open-hearted sociality among so many friends, was terminated by a private conference with Alfred; and his couch was spread beside that of his illustrious monarch. The most rigid watch was placed upon the North-

men; and the voices of the guards were heard at intervals breaking the deep silence of night.

It was with a happier frame of mind than he had ever before known that Edmund lay down to sleep. His fame was cleared,—his honour shone bright,—his hopes were tinged as with hues of heaven. Through sorrow and peril he had held on the path of integrity; and his reward was come. The voice of Elfrida seemed breathing in his ear,—her countenance, radiant with happiness and love, was ever before his eyes. "The horse hoofs are ringing on the ground," said he continually to himself, "that bear to my beloved the joyful tidings. They will not rest,—they will not linger, till they bring to her the first dawning of happiness. With the morning will the hope-stirring scroll greet her eyes: another day will pass, and the light will gather upon her,—another——and then——Oh my God! I shall clasp her in my arms—I shall look in her face—I shall hear the music of her voice—I shall whisper to her that she will be mine!"

Such were the emotions that gave to Edmund a sleepless night of bliss. In all his cogitations

the luckless brother Elf never once mingled: yet were the labours of that worthy person destined on the morrow to have an effect as unexpected as pleasing to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

The morning brought Sidroc to the camp, a sorrowing bearer of the peremptory refusal of the Northmen to accede to the terms proposed. He himself, however, was desirous to enter into discourse upon the truths of that religion to which he felt disposed to yield belief; and Kinelm, bishop of Winchester, a sincere, but somewhat bigotted and dogmatic person, was appointed by the king to hold commune with him. After the military duties of the camp had been attended to, Alfred sat with his nobles and friends in council, when the good Bishop Kinelm, with pallid countenance and shaking limbs, hastily entered.

"So please you, my liege," he said in answer to an enquiry of the king, respecting the cause of his agitation, "I would humbly request of your goodness to appoint some other man to this

charge. As well might I hope to make convert of the arch enemy himself as of this fiery Northman. I did but tell him briefly that his gods were false and bloody,—that Odin, and Thor, and all the rest of their pagan deities, were but fiends of darkness,—and that he himself, and all his countrymen, would be punished with fire and brimstone in hell for evermore, if they did not believe in Christ—when he started up with a fury and noise like the bursting of a great wave, and swore by the serpents of Nastrond, and the flames of Surtur, and I know not what hideous oaths beside, that he would put me to death on the spot, if I gave tongue to such blasphemy. What to do with him, I know not. But I fled from him at all the speed of my limbs: and I pray of your majesty that I may not be called upon again to put myself into such perilous strait."

The king smiled: "You have been hasty, my reverend brother," he said. "The plant that hath long grown crooked, may not at once be made straight. I will myself confer with the Northman. But my young friend," turning to

Edmund, "*your* voice will be pleasing to the stormy Sea-king. Haste, and soothe his indignation; and speak to him as the God of truth will prompt you. A proud and stiff-necked race are we all. The very constancy of heart which, after a time, holdeth us firm to the truth, stirreth us at first to resist it. The apostles themselves, even from the mouth of Christ, hearkened not at first to the truths which shocked their prejudices, and opposed the doctrines in which they had so long believed. How then shall we marvel that this strong-hearted warrior should at the outset turn a deaf ear to new instructors. Thou wilt be gentle with him, my young friend, and lead him to know the tree by its fruits. If he see that this of which he hath hitherto eaten be but profitless and unsupporting,—though custom, mayhap, hath rendered it pleasant to his eye,—then will his own axe be laid to the root, and he will gather cheerfully of that which will be wholesome and strengthening unto him."

The austere prelate felt rebuked by this mild, and prudent counsel; but felt, nevertheless, no

inclination to return to his task. Edmund gladly undertook the duty committed to him; and found a serious, and not unreasonable auditor.

Sidroc returned to his countrymen animated with a warmer zeal in the cause that he had undertaken; and his last words to Edmund, as he concluded a somewhat long discourse at the very foot of the hill, whither the youth had attended him on his departure, expressed a growing confidence in the truth of what had been propounded to him, and a determination to work with the utmost of his strength upon the minds of his countrymen. After appointing another interview for the succeeding morrow, the friends exchanged their cordial good wishes, and parted.

It was with a delighted heart that Edmund hastened back to report to Alfred the favourable impression made upon the mind of the Sea-king: but circumstances occurred which turned his emotions into another channel, and, for several hours, banished all distinction of Christian or Pagan, Saxon or Northman, utterly from his thoughts. He was advancing at a brisk pace, though with a look of earnest seriousness, to-

ward the royal pavilion, when Sigifred, his head uncovered, and his black locks floating in the wind,—his face pale, his eyes flashing and wide,—and his whole demeanour expressing some uncommon ardour of delight,—ran up to him,—caught him in his arms,—seized his hand,—and began to drag him off in another direction.

"Come, come, come,—come away—come away," was all he could at first utter.

"But, my dear Sigifred," said Edmund, smiling as he yielded to this strange compulsion, "What has chanced? where do you take me?"

"Ask no questions,—come along, come along,"—was the reply: "The good father Cynewulf is arrived,—you must come to my tent,—joy! joy!"

It was long since Edmund had parted from his first kind father; and the interval had been filled with events momentous and trying: there needed nothing more to make the affectionate youth spring forward at a pace that satisfied his companion's utmost impatience; and they quickly stood beside the tent.

"Stay here one instant," said Sigifred,—and

sprang through the door. Edmund heard a faint exclamation within, followed by a gentle "hush!"—and almost immediately after, Sigifred reappeared.

"The good father is alone," said he, "and impatient to see you. But I must away to the Earl. Christ bless you, my dear Edmund! I hope he brings you pleasant tidings."

He wrung the hand of the youth as he spoke, then hastily retired. Edmund with eager hand drew back the drapery which covered the door of the tent.

"My beloved father!" he cried, as he entered, with a voice tremulous from emotion: but his eager foot suddenly stopped,—his voice failed him,—his face grew ghastly pale,—his eyeballs appeared as if they would start from his head: he gasped,—trembled,—tottered feebly onward,—and sank, embracing and embraced, upon the bosom of Elfrida.

A long silence followed: both sobbed aloud: the cheek of Edmund was bathed with tears from the eyes of the noble maiden: they looked each in the pale face of the other—exchanged

the kiss of ardent affection,—drew back to gaze anew,—breathed each the loved one's name,—again bent on in long and fervid embrace,—and at length, with trembling accents, began the sweet discourse of lovers parted long, and met no more to part.

Such discourse, however, although to the parties concerned the most exquisite eloquence in nature, is rarely much relished by a reader of it, unless when sustained with a far higher skill than aught that we can pretend to. To the fancy of the reader, therefore, it must be left. It will, of course, be understood that each had to enquire of the other, and, in turn to relate, the perils and sorrows that by each had been endured since the sad moment when they were so abruptly separated. Much of this is already known to the reader; and it is for the sake of the *very* curious alone that we think it important to notice the cause of the sudden and unexpected appearance of Elfrida among the ranks of war.

The sudden absconsion of brother Elf from the forge-bellows of the smith cannot have been

forgotten; and it may perhaps have been noted that he threw out hints touching certain other bellows which he proposed to work betwixt that night and the following day. Doubtless these obscure words had reference to his own personal wind-chest, since it appeared that, before noon of the succeeding day, the untirable musician had actually accomplished on foot a distance of three score and ten miles, that he might carry to the lady Elfrida, at Maximus Castle, the tidings of her lover's existence, and safety. With hands and face unwashed, save by the torrents of sweat that poured down from his brow, he at length, after two refusals on the part of the sorrowing lady, was admitted to her presence. With divers strange noises, and jumpings, contortions of face, and slapping of hands, he, for a time, with utter disregard of place and person, threw out by fragments the news which he had sense enough to know it would be dangerous to reveal at once.

"Ha-ha—ha-ha—ha-ha—ha-ha"—cried he, running round the echoing hall, swinging his arms, and keeping his blackened face and star-

ing eyes full upon the lady. "Ha-ha—ha-ha——I've seen him—I've seen him—ha-ha—ha-ha—"

The attendant had retired, at the command of Elfrida, before Elf entered; and she now began to regret that she had exposed herself to the raving of such a madman. She arose, and was about to quit the hall: but the grimy messenger prevented her.

"Tol-lol-de-rol-dol—ha-ha—ha-ha"—he cried, seizing without scruple her rich dress in his sooty paws—"He's alive—he's alive,—tol-lol-de-rol-dol."

The surprise and fear of Elfrida increased, and she called aloud for aid. The attendant, however, was out of hearing: and the delighted monk continued his exclamations, becoming gradually more and more emphatic, and intelligible, until the startling truth began to appear to her. The intensity of her emotions at the first glimpse of this overwhelming hope, struck Elf silent, and, for a time, interrupted his caperings. The whole was at length gradually revealed to her; and, in less than an hour after,

she was on horseback, hasting to throw herself into the arms of her lover.

Father Cynewulf, who on the previous night had arrived from France, and was about to return to the priory of Cothelstone, no sooner heard that his beloved child was restored, than, with an eagerness that he had not for years manifested, he demanded, in the name of the Earl, horses and attendants to convey him to the army: and under his protection it was that Elfrida had resolved to undertake the journey.

Such was the substance of the story which the lady, very briefly at first, but more minutely on the following day, gave to her inquiring lover. The name of the messenger, she said, was Coifi,—but Edmund knew well enough that, strictly interpreted, Coifi meant Elf; and was much less surprised than Elfrida had been, to hear that, at the first mention of father Cynewulf in the castle, the dismayed messenger had fled, no man knew whither.

The lovers had passed two hours of the most perfect happiness together, when Sigifred interrupted them.

"Pardon me, my beloved sister," he said, "pardon me, my dear Edmund: I come to announce to you a summons of the king for your immediate presence in the royal tent. Nay—do not look so startled, Elfrida: this is no affair of war: and your champion will soon return to you without injury of life or limb."

"Know you aught of the business in hand?" demanded Edmund, somewhat loth to quit his new found elysium for the every day world without.

"Not a word," was the reply. "The monk Cynewulf and my father, after a long private interview in the tent of the Earl, have been for the last hour in close conference with the king. I can make no guess at the matter of their discourse;—but the faces of both, as they passed to the royal pavilion, expressed great seriousness, and, as I thought, some agitation. But you must away, for the summons was for instant attendance. I will stay to console Elfrida during your absence by a smart lecture upon the propriety of long journies on horseback, undertaken by ladies to greet their lovers."

He spoke this with a smile at both. Edmund impressed one kiss upon the hand of Elfrida, —shook that of Sigifred,—and hastily left the tent.

The suddenness of this summons,—the appearance of agitation which Sigifred had remarked in the looks of the monk and the Earl, —awoke in Edmund a presentiment of somewhat evil, or at the least, very unpleasant, at hand; but a glance at the face of Alfred, and the first words uttered by him, dispelled all his apprehensions.

"Child of my brother!" cried the monarch, flinging his arms around the neck of the astonished youth, while the tears stood in his eyes, and voice and look attested the most powerful emotion; "Offspring of her to whom I owe so much!"—

Edmund drew a little back, and gazed with speechless wonder upon the face of the king—

"Yes," continued Alfred, "child of the blessed Judith, the noble grand-daughter of Charlemagne, who first taught my boyish lips to read the words of wisdom, and pointed to my

straying feet the path that led to earth's most prized treasures. No erring impulse was it, my beloved Edmund, that, from the first, made my heart yearn towards thee,—but the voice of nature herself prompting unheard within. Oh! how grateful, how proud, ought I not to be, that I find, in the son of my brother, one so good, so brave, so worthy of all esteem and admiration!—But the noble lady of thy love is here: let the tidings make glad her heart. Haste thee, Earl Ethelbert,—bring before us thy Elfrida; the worthy Leofric also must know, in the boy whom he protected, the nephew of his king,—the brave Theodric too,—and the proud, but generous Sigifred;—let them all hasten, and learn ——"

"Pardon me, my liege," said the monk, bowing with great respect to the king, while he extended his hand to detain the Earl,—"Pardon me if I remind you of the strong reasons wherefore this should be kept from the general ear. He of the iron arm is jealous and fierce;—and the noble Judith might meet from him anger undeserved. To yourself, and a few beside, she

bade me make known the truth, but from all others still to keep it hid."

"I thank you, reverend father," replied the king: "of a truth I was forgetful: yet to these, under vow of secrecy, surely may it be told. But why am I thus impatient? Oh! how the full heart swells to speak its joys or its sorrows! Let us calm ourselves. Sit, sit my friends: and thou, my new-found treasure,—share with me now one honoured seat, as in our times of trial, thou didst share with me one lowly bed."

Edmund had not been able to utter a word. He looked with wonder and delight upon the monarch, and returned the unrelaxing pressure of his hand, as he took his place beside him upon a rich throne, on which had heretofore reclined at his luxurious banquets the proud and sensual Godrun.

"But the chain, and cross," cried Alfred suddenly, as they were in the act of sitting down,—"hast thou these about thee? or hath the plunderer ——"

"They are here, my liege," said Edmund,

opening with trembling fingers his doublet, and presenting them to the eager king.

"How blind, and how forgetful was I,"—exclaimed Alfred, as he almost snatched them from the hand of the youth. "Well can I recall them now. A hundred times have I, in my boyish days, taken them from the neck of your mother, my beloved Edmund: they hung round my own, I now can well remember, when the illumined missal first delighted my eyes, and was promised as the reward of diligence to him that should first learn to read it.* How could I

* But the great cause of the dearth of intellectual cultivation at that period was, that few would learn to read. Alfred had passed eleven years without having acquired this easy though inestimable accomplishment. A prince, son of a father who had been educated for the church; who had twice visited Rome, and resided at Paris after Charlemagne had improved his people, was yet passing into youth without the simplest of all tuition, which the poorest infant is now invited and urged to attain. That he received it at last was owing to his step-mother, Judith. When Alfred was twelve years old, she was sitting one day, surrounded by her family, with a manuscript of Saxon poetry in her hands. As

have so forgotten that which I had such cause to bear in mind! Yet was there an obscure feeling

Aldhelm and Cedmon had written poems of great popularity, it may have contained some of theirs. That she was able to read is not surprising, because she was a Franc, and the Francs had received from the Anglo-Saxons a taste for literary pursuits, and were cultivating them with superior ardour. With a happy judgment she proposed it as a gift to him who would the soonest learn to read it. The whole incident may have been chance play, but it was fruitful of consequences. The elder princes, one then a king, the others in mature youth or manhood, thought the reward inadequate to the task, and were silent. But the mind of Alfred, captivated by the prospect of information, and pleased with the beautiful decoration of the first letter of the writing, inquired if she actually intended to give it to such of her children as would the soonest learn to understand and repeat it. His mother repeating the promise, with a smile of joy at the question, he took the book, found out an instructor, and learnt to read it. When his industry had crowned his wishes with success, he recited it to her.* To this important, though seemingly trivial incident, we owe all the intellectual cultivation, and all

* Asser, 16.

in my heart of old acquaintance with the valued relick. Remember you not how the first sight

the literary works of Alfred; and all the benefit which by these he imparted to his countrymen. If this family conversation had not occurred, Alfred would probably have lived and died as ignorant, as unimportant, and as little known as his three brothers. For the momentous benefit thus begun to Alfred, the memory of Judith deserves our gratitude. His brothers had reached manhood without having been taught letters by their father, who, though he had received an ecclesiastical education, had left both them and Alfred illiterate. Nine years old at his father's death, and yet wholly uninstructed; with one brother on the throne, and two more so near it as ultimately to succeed to it, equally uneducated; and surrounded by nobles as ignorant, and with no lettered clergy about the throne, whence could Alfred have received this necessary introduction to all his improvement, if the more intelligent Judith, the granddaughter of Charlemagne, had not been transplanted by Ethelwulph from Paris to England, and even detained there by Ethelbald. This French princess was the kind Minerva from whom arose the first shoots of that intellectual character which we admire in Alfred. To such remote and apparently unconnected causes do we often owe our greatest blessings.—Turner's Anglo-Saxon History, Vol. 2d, p. 9.

of it stirred me, as we stood by the river's bank? —But thou art impatient, my beloved Edmund, to hear the story of thy birth, and to know the causes that have so long held thee in obscurity. Speak, reverend father, for the tumult of joy is yet too strong within me to give smooth flow to thought: thou also best canst tell that which to thyself is known the best. Praised be God for this blessing, as for so many others of which I am undeserving!"

This last ejaculation was uttered in a low and fervent tone, and with eyes devoutly uplifted. There was then a short silence, and the monk afterwards commenced his narration.

This tale which, with various interruptions of enquiry and explanation, occupied no inconsiderable time, we shall compress into a few lines.

It will be remembered by the reader of Anglo-Saxon history, that Ethelwulph, the father of Alfred, on his return from Rome, fell in love with, and married, Judith, the daughter of Charles the king of France, in whose court he had been honourably entertained. The match was most unequal in point of years,—Ethel-

wulph being in advanced age, and the beautiful and accomplished grand-daughter of Charlemagne, probably about her sixteenth winter. After the death of Ethelwulph, his son Ethelbald married the young widow: but, though there were not wanting precedents of such marriages, though it was approved by Charles, and at first unopposed by the counsellors of Ethelbald, or by the clergy, yet, as contrary to Christian customs and institutions, it soon encountered so much censure, that the king, at the continued exhortations of Swithin, bishop of Winchester, was at length induced to annul it. The beautiful Judith,—who, during her residence in England, had first imbued the mind of young Alfred with that thirst of knowledge, and those principles of piety, which never afterwards left him, and to which, even at this present nineteenth century we may be indebted for so much that is valuable in our laws and constitution,—immediately after this second widowhood, sold all her possessions in England, and prepared to return to the court of her father. But, almost immediately after the divorce, she became aware

of being in a situation which, but for this measure, might have made her mother to a king of Wessex. She now delayed her return to France; and, with the advice of those whose opinions she relied upon, and in accordance with her own views of what, in the existing state of the country, would be the best and wisest course, retired to a convent in Berkshire, where she gave birth to the child Edmund, whose fortunes have been the subject of our narrative. The same reasons for secrecy still prevailed; and the sorrowing mother tore herself from her child, and returned to France. Here she lived for a time in the court of her father, with undimmed reputation, and in regal state; and was at length married to Baldwin, Count of Flanders, known by the name of The Arm of Iron. The rank of Judith had been unknown at the convent in which she had taken shelter. The infant was removed, and placed, with ample provisions for his support and education, under the care of the monk Cynewulf, who had been known to the unhappy queen as a distinguished member of the train that attended Ethelwulf to Rome, and wit-

nessed the ceremony of her marriage to that monarch. The boy was in his third winter when Cynewulf removed with him to the monastery of Croyland, where a few years of happiness were terminated by the terrible catastrophe recorded in our early pages. By three persons only had the mystery of his birth been known; two of them had perished on that occasion; and the monk Cynewulf had, since that time, been the sole depositary of the secret.

It will easily be understood that all the evils of a disputed right to the throne might have resulted from a general knowledge of these facts: and it cannot have been forgotten that, at the moment when the sceptre seemed abandoned by Alfred, the monk, after a private interview with the disaffected Earl of Somerset, had set forth on some secret expedition, of which the hinted purpose was to take measures for filling the vacant throne. Little, however, had it been suspected by the proud Ethelbert that the stranger youth, whom he was so soon to load with hatred and contempt for presuming to the love of his daughter, was the same individual whom he hop-

ed speedily to invest with the crown of Wessex. As little did Edmund, when he communicated to the disguised monarch his belief that such attempt was in contemplation, know, that the intended rival of that king was himself the narrator of the meditated treason.

The true character of Alfred had been unknown to the pious and learned Cynewulf,—but by Judith it had been more properly appreciated. The proposal of the monk that aid, in arms and in money, should be afforded by the court of Flanders for the purpose of placing her son upon the throne of Wessex, had been first communicated in a private interview to Judith, but had been instantly rejected by her.

"Return holy father," said that illustrious woman, "and better know him whom you would seek to displace from a throne which no other can so worthily fill."

Ethelbert, meantime, during the long absence of Cynewulf, whom sickness had detained upon his homeward journey, seeing the changed prospect of affairs, had abandoned his purpose, and sought a reconciliation, readily accorded him,

with the restored monarch. The monk also,—though his had been a sin of better intentioned ignorance,—had acknowledgments to make of his error, and pardon to beg for his share in an attempt, which he soon learned to view as one of deepest wrong. Nor was forgiveness to him more reluctantly granted, than it had already been to his more powerful and less excusable coadjutor.

The story of his birth, which we have thus briefly, though, we fear, somewhat formally and dully, related, was listened to by our hero with the intensest interest. The evidence of its truth was deemed satisfactory; and, after renewed congratulations from all, and mutual expressions of affectionate attachment betwixt himself and the monarch, Edmund was permitted to be the sole announcer of the momentous tidings to his beloved Elfrida.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is not that the rare and singular Anglo-Saxon manuscripts,—unknown, as we feel assured, to all preceding writers,—from which we compile this our humble history, do not supply with as much minuteness of detail, as on some former occasions, the materials, nay almost the very words, of the above discourse, that we have thought proper to give it thus in abbreviated narrative, instead of the more lively and dramatic, though necessarily more diffuse, form of dialogue; but, because we are conscious that the pleasant fever of hope and of fear is passed by, and that the period of listlessness and exhaustion, in both writer and reader, must be fast approaching. The best of the wine, such as it was, has been quaffed; and of what remains, dull and spiritless as we fear it must be found, we would desire to press upon our guests no

more than just sufficient to slake the slight thirst which may still be felt. The last breathings of the most ardent warrior must be feeble: the brightest sun must wax dim ere it sink beneath the horizon: and the interest of the most stirring tale must subside into calmness, too often into languor and weariness.

If it be objected by some that we have not furnished such evidence respecting the birth of our hero as ought to have satisfied the king, or the youth himself, let it be believed that, in the veracity of the monk, and in much of the details which we have suppressed, might be ample grounds for their conviction. Let it be furthermore remembered, that the good monk had not to prove the right of his adopted son to the throne of Wessex, or even to an estate of which he had been dispossessed, but the claim of mutual affection betwixt two illustrious persons equally delighted to acknowledge it. Evidence that would not procure the verdict of a jury, may be irresistible in producing moral conviction. In the present case, however, no proof would have been deficient that the severest scrutiny could

have called for. This, we trust, may suffice. It is not as the son of a king, or the descendant of Charlemagne, that we hope favour for our hero, but as a noble human creature. We have attended him through sorrows and through trials, and the glory that has at length settled upon him is the consequence, and the reward, of high virtues, not an unmerited prize, drawn in the lottery of Fortune.

In accordance with the opinion already expressed, we shall now, with all possible briefness, supply what remains untold of our story.

History informs us that, after resolutely holding out in their intrenched camp till hunger compelled submission, the Danes accepted the terms of Alfred, swore eternal peace, professed themselves Christians, were baptized, and, finally, settled under the rule of Godrun, in the kingdom of East Anglia. From our own materials we can add that, in the bringing about of this important measure in a spirit of good faith on the part of the Northmen, much was owing to the labours, and the proud integrity, of the Sea-king Sidroc, in whom at least, if not

in many of his countrymen, the purer religion of Christ had wholly effaced the perilous errors of the creed in which he had been nurtured. Peace was thus restored, and the events of after years, with which our story has nothing to do, proved the wise policy of Alfred in having converted the terrible enemies of his country into stanch defenders, by giving them a property in the soil, and a consequent stake in its welfare.

In the disposal of our dramatis personæ, we shall begin with him who has been most conspicuous throughout. It will readily be supposed that, to the son of Ethelbald and Judith,—the nephew and distinguished friend of Alfred,—the wealthy and renowned Earl of Wilts,—neither the proud Sigifred, nor the haughty Earl of Somerset could hold that objection which, when the same individual had been only the high-minded, but unknown stranger, they had felt towards him as the presumptuous lover of Elfrida. There needed now no good offices of the king to induce the powerful nobleman to receive Earl Edmund as the future husband of his

beautiful daughter. In the eye of Elfrida, however, the illustrious young warrior and earl was not more truly illustrious, more loved, or more admired, than when, great only in himself, he had to contend against poverty, contempt, hatred, and opprobrium. It was on the noble man, not the nobleman, that her affections were fixed, with that intensity which lives in the heart of woman alone. By Cyneburga Edmund had long been regarded with almost a mother's tenderness; she had deeply lamented his supposed death; and now hailed with delight the prospect that she might soon call him with truth her son.

A month only had elapsed after the final battle, before the nuptials of Earl Edmund, and Elfrida, the daughter of Ethelbert,—also of Sir Sigifred, and Ethelburga, the daughter of Leofric, were solemnized in the castle of Maximus. The whole details of this interesting event are in our eye; but, for the considerations beforenamed, and also because of certain characters on the upper corners of our pages, which admonish us continually to despatch, we shall say little

more than, that King Alfred himself, and his queen Alswitha, assisted at the ceremony, and remained for some days after, delighted visitors. There were also present Theodric the Earl of Berks,—Oddune the Earl of Devon,—and, not the least distinguished guests, the brave Sea-king Sidroc, his still beautiful wife, the golden-haired queen, and her gentle daughter Windreda, who, in a few months after, was herself espoused by Athilhard, son to the Earl of Dorset, who was on this occasion for the first time presented to her.

Among the humbler witnesses of the ceremony, and the sitters at the lower tables of the protracted banquets, was Cutha, the former handmaiden of Aslauga, and the kind attendant upon Edmund, after his dangerous wound from the dagger of Heldor. Denulf also was there,—the meek-faced neatherd, in whose house Alfred had found shelter, and who, it must here be recorded from history, advanced himself in later years so considerably upon that path of learning to which the disguised king had first directed his steps, that he at length honourably

held the see of Winchester. Nor was his buxom wife, dame Swetha, forgotten. Blushing at first like a delicate rose, she took her seat in the magnificent hall. But that faint flush wore off; and ere, for the edification of her immediate companions, she concluded at night her story of the burned loaves, and the assault royal,—the deep laughter-dye that covered face, neck and arms, might, it is said, have been better likened to the glow of her own fire, at the height of baking-heat. How, in after times, she supported her state as lady of the bishop Denulf, our authorities do not exactly inform us. We may however suppose, that the pale face of the dignitary, her spouse, waxed gradually fuller and more florid under her active superintendance of kitchen comforts; and that, though she no longer fed her own swine, or brewed her own ale and mead, or stood at the churning tub,—or even assisted at the once so important labour of "setting the batch for a new baking,"—she long continued to relish the luxuries with which such labour at other hands could supply her. Whether, how-

ever, the lady of the bishop, or the toil-loving wife of the neatherd, were the happier woman, is a problem which we do not undertake to solve.

But, among other humble visitors,—for the gates were open to all who came,—was a man of diminutive stature, the harp-bearer of a minstrel or gleeman, of whom no one knew any thing, except that he played very badly upon the harp, when on one occasion he was compelled to touch it,—and that, in spite of his spare person, he consumed more victuals than four stout men. His face was of a deep brown hue, like that of one from a far country: he talked unceasingly in certain companies, and in others remained utterly silent: but his head and limbs never remained an instant at rest. It was observed that he had speedily ingratiated himself with the chief cooks, the butler, the pantler, and with all, in short, who had any thing to do with the supplying of good cheer. In their private sittings he had twice or thrice astonished these worthies by singing songs of love, or war, hunting, or drinking, in a style such as they had rarely heard:

but, in the presence of other company, his voice was ever mute. A piece of some relishing food was commonly to be found in his pocket,—and in his bed-chamber had been discovered the remains of a venison pasty, baked in a huge earthen dish. But this was a time of unlimited revelry; and no objection was made by any one. It chanced, however, one day, that he had feasted and drunken, ere the time of the mid-day meal, till his wonted caution left him; and, all alone, in the exuberance of his spirits, he was giving vent, at the full pitch of his voice, to the song of Cissa Sabert, when Alfred, attended by Earl Edmund and the Sea-king Sidroc, passed near the chamber, and, attracted by the uncommon excellence and power of the voice, entered to see the musician. The countenance of the songster fell at sight of his unexpected audience; and, with a hideous quaver, and contortion of mouth, he closed his performance. The monarch read in the swimming eye, and the unsteady limbs, that the morning potations of the minstrel had been too free,—and, without a word, instantly retired with the Sea-king. But Edmund remain-

ed; and fixed his eyes upon the abashed face of the reveller. There was a pause. The little man held down his head, and strove to stand steady. There was no other person present; and Edmund at length advanced toward him.

"My good brother,"—said he, laying his hand gently on the shoulder of the disguised monk, and speaking in a tone of kind reproof.

"I could not help it,"—replied Elf, gravely shaking his head.

But we must not pursue the discourse that followed. Suffice it to say that Earl Edmund did not plead in vain for pardon of the restless recusant. Proper steps were taken to free him from a situation, the duties of which his natural infirmities so ill fitted him to discharge; and he became, soon after, a member of the establishment of Earl Edmund, at his castle of Hindon, in Wilts. In this situation we are not aware of the precise duties, if any, that were expected from him. He seemed to exist chiefly for his own amusement, though he contributed greatly to that of all about him. In the workshop of every artisan for miles round, might singing Elf

be in turn seen. If the plane, the saw, or the axe of the carpenter were heard proceeding at unusual rate,—if the bellows, or the hammer of the smith, gave out din uncommon,—or if the flail of the thrasher, or the shuttle of the weaver, spoke out in double quick time, to singing Elf was the novelty attributed. When the dance or the song of the winter's eve was heard within at merriest fit, the passers by would pause, and say to each other, " frisky Elf must be there, let us hearken awhile." For many years he continued to be an early riser, a rapid walker, an unmatched trencher-man, and a headlong rider: but, though he ever relished his horn and his song, we do not find that he was more than twice found guilty of the offence for which he had been placed in the split stick: and, as these were occasions of jubilee at the births of a young Edmund, and a young Elfrida, he probably felt no pricking of conscience for an offence so justified. At certain times he would suddenly disappear from the castle of Hindon, and might then be heard of in that of Maximus, or of Cothelstone; or in the kitchen of the beloved bro-

ther Mollo at the priory. But he has sung his last song, and eaten his last meal, and drunken his last cup, and taken his last long journey. Peace to his now resting soul!

One person only, of all who had been known to Edmund, felt vexation at his change of fortune. Oswulf was a profound hypocrite, but could not disguise the hatred with which he still viewed the exalted object of his disappointed malice. His conduct had given bitterest pain and shame to his parents; but he did not long continue to afflict them, except by the remembrance of his bad life, and miserable end. Within a few months after the marriage of his sister, he was gored almost to death by a bull that he was inhumanly baiting; and expired in great agony on the following day. The thane and his lady felt parental sorrow at the end of even so wretched a son: but their domestic happiness was much promoted by his removal.

Of Kentwina it may be briefly noted that, as she advanced in years, so she continued to advance in estimation of her own profound skill as a medical practitioner. A singular cure, how-

ever, wrought under her own eye by the leech Wiglaf, and that too on a day held by her to be more than usually unlucky, contributed greatly to raise that learned person in her opinion. The medicine administered on this important occasion had been actually prescribed in the hated foreign jargon,—yet its effect had seemed miraculous; and she was heard to drop hints of an intention to become herself a proficient in the Latin tongue, through which such wonders had been performed. The first words, however, which brother Cynewulf, with a smile, proposed for her accomplishment, "hic, hæc, hoc," appeared to her such frightful gibberish that she rose in disgust, and was never known to demand farther instruction.

The pious and learned Cynewulf was frequently, and for considerable periods of time, a visitor at the court of Alfred, by whom he was much and justly prized. He succeeded at the death of his brother to the dignity of prior; and continued till his decease, at an advanced age, upon terms of the closest affection with his ever grateful pupil.

To Earl Sidroc, Alfred allotted ample possessions in the neighbourhood of his ever-fast friend the Earl of Wilts. The noble Sea-king had at length finally laid down the sword, and devoted himself to higher pursuits. He lived in opulence,—respected, admired, loved, or feared, by all. He shared the friendship and the counsels of the king; and was often in turn the honoured guest, and host, of Alfred and of Edmund.

We did not interrupt the hasty course of our narrative to describe the boundless joy with which our hero, and the now no longer sorrowing daughter of Leofric met on his triumphant return to the house in which he had passed with her so many years of mingled happiness and misery. But the reader may already have conceived it. They sprang to each others arms with the pure fervour of brotherly and sisterly love, grounded on mutual esteem, and rivetted by a thousand acts of the tenderest kindness. Through life this sentiment tied them to each other. To Sigifred, Edmund was ever, more than in law, as a brother: Elfrida and Ethelbur-

ga were as sisters whose bond is not that of blood, but of kindred souls.

Looking forward into years we find that, at the death of the stout old Leofric, Sigifred, and his gentle Ethelburga dwelt long in affluence and happiness at the mansion of Cothelstone. Nor did the death of Ethelbert make them quit their beloved abode. By a yet farther glimpse into time we read, that the next possessors of the magnificent castle of Maximus, were the illustrious statesman and warrior, Edmund, and his Elfrida.

THE END.

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